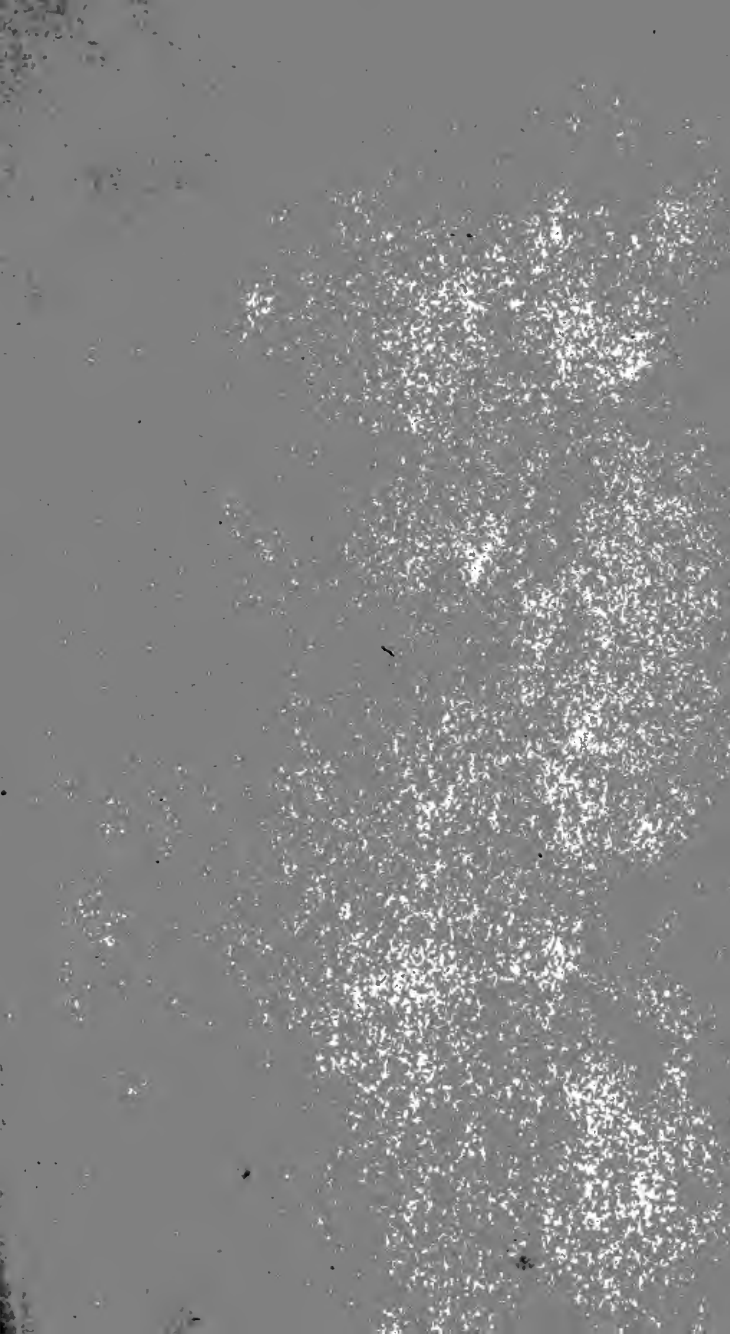




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G O D O L P H I N.

A NOVEL.

Sleep,
Voluptuous Cæsar, and security
Seize on thy powers!

Ben Jonson's Fall of Sejanus.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,
(SUCCESSOR TO HENRY COLBURN.)

1833.

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PREFACE.

THIS Tale is woven from real events; and he who gives it to the world has undertaken rather the task of the compiler, than that of the author. Its main tendency is apparently to show the influences exercised by the great world over the more intellectual, the more daring, and the more imaginative of its inmates of either sex. It has some connexion with the social and political History of the Time;—and the Time itself, however busy

it be, is always egotist enough to glance at every reflection of its features, and to find fault with the fidelity of the mirror.

Should any of the idlers who have leisure to waste on trifles, attempt to pry into so unimportant a secret as the name of the individual whose humble task it has been from a Memoir to construct a Romance, their ingenuity will be exercised in vain :—that secret, of consequence to none but himself, he trusts and believes that he shall carry to a grave, which (amidst a sea of infirmities and care) smiles upon him, near and welcome—the Haven of Repose.

***** April 23, 1833.

GODOLPHIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-BED OF JOHN VERNON.—HIS DYING WORDS.
—DESCRIPTION OF HIS DAUGHTER, THE HEROINE.—
THE OATH.

“Is the night calm, Constance?”

“Beautiful: the moon is up.”

“Open the shutters wider, there. *It is* a beautiful night. How beautiful! Come hither, my child.”

The rich moonlight that now shone through the windows, streamed on little that it could invest with poetical attraction. The room was small, though not squalid in its character and

appliances. The bed-curtains, of a dull chintz, were drawn back, and showed the form of a man, past middle age, propped by pillows, and bearing on his countenance the marks of approaching death. But what a countenance it still was! The broad, pale, lofty brow; the fine, straight, Grecian nose; the short, curved lip; the full, dimpled chin; the stamp of genius in every line and lineament;—these still defied disease, or rather borrowed from its very ghastliness a more impressive majesty. Beside the bed was a table, spread with books of a motley character. Here an abstruse system of Calculations on Finance; there a volume of wild Bacchanalian Songs; here the lofty aspirations of “Plato’s Phædo;” and there the last speech of some County Paris on a Malt Tax; old newspapers and dusty pamphlets completed the intellectual litter; and above them rose, mournfully enough, the tall, spec-

tral form of a half-emptied phial, and a chamber-candlestick, crested by its extinguisher.

A light step approached the bed-side, and opposite the dying man now stood a girl, who might have seen her thirteenth year. But her features—of an exceeding, and what may be termed, a regal beauty—were as fully developed as those of one who had told twice her years; and not a trace of the bloom or the undeterminate softness of girlhood could be marked on her countenance. Her complexion was pale as the whitest marble, but clear and lustrous; and her raven hair, parted over her brow in a fashion then uncommon, increased the statue-like and classic effect of her noble features. The expression of her countenance seemed cold, sedate, and somewhat stern: but it might, in some measure, have belied her heart; for, when turned to the moonlight, you might see that her eyes

were filled with tears, though she did not weep; and you might tell by the quivering of her lip, that a little hesitation in replying to any remark from the sufferer, arose from her difficulty in commanding her emotions.

“Constance,” said the invalid, after a pause, in which he seemed to have been gazing with a quiet heart on the soft skies, that, blue and eloquent with stars, he beheld through the unclosed windows:—“Constance, the hour is coming; I feel it by signs which I cannot mistake. I shall die this night.”

“Oh! God!—my father!—my dear, dear father!” broke from Constance’s lips; “do not speak thus—do not—I will go to Doctor——”

“No, child, no; I loathe, I detest the thought of help. They denied it me while it was yet time. They left me to starve, or to rot in gaol, or to hang myself! They left

me like a dog, and like a dog I will die! I would not have one iota taken from the justice—the deadly and dooming weight of my dying curse.” Here violent spasms broke on the speech of the sufferer; and when, by medicine and his daughter’s attentions, he had recovered, he said, in a lower and calmer key:—
“Is all quiet below, Constance? Are all in bed? The landlady—the servants—our fellow lodgers?”

“All, my father.”

“Ay; then I shall die happy. Thank God you are my only nurse and attendant. I remember the day when I was ill after one of their rude debauches. Ill!—a sick headache—a fit of the spleen—a spoiled lap-dog’s illness! Well: they wanted me that night to support one of their paltry measures—their Parliamentary measures; and I had a Prince feeling my pulse, and a Duke mixing my

draught, and a dozen Earls sending their doctors to me. I was of use to them then. Poor me! Read me that note, Constance; Flamborough's note. Do you hesitate? Read it, I say."

Constance trembled, and complied.

"MY DEAR VERNON,

"I am really *au désespoir* to hear of your melancholy state;—so sorry I cannot assist you. But you know my embarrassed circumstances. By-the-by, I saw his Royal Highness yesterday. 'Poor Vernon,' said he, 'would a hundred pounds do him any good?' So we don't forget you, *mon cher*. Ah! how we missed you at the Beefsteak! Never shall we know again so glorious a *bon vivant*. You would laugh to hear L—— attempting to echo your old jokes. But time presses: I must be off to the House. You know what a mo-

tion it is. Would to God you were to bring it on instead of that ass T——. Adieu! I wish I could come and see you; but it would break my heart. Can I send you any books from Hookham's? Yours ever,

“FLAMBOROUGH.”

“This is the man whom I made Secretary of State,” said Vernon. “Very well! oh, it's very well, very well indeed! Let me kiss thee, my girl. Poor Constance! You will have good friends when I am dead! they will be proud enough to minister to Vernon's daughter, when Death has shown them Vernon was a loss. You are very handsome. Your poor mother's eyes and hair—my father's splendid brow and lip; and your figure, even now so stately! They will court you; you will have lords and great men enough at your feet; but you will never forget this night, or the agony of your father's

death-bed face, and the brand they have burnt in his heart. And now, Constance, give me the Bible in which you read to me this morning:—that will do:—stand away from the light and fix your eyes on mine, and listen as if your soul were in your ear.

“ When I was a young man, toiling my way to fortune through the labours of the Bar,—prudent, cautious, indefatigable, confident of success,—certain lords, who heard I possessed genius, and thought I might become their tool, came unto me, and besought me to enter Parliament. I told them I was poor—was lately married—that my public ambition must not be encouraged at the expense of my private fortunes. They answered, that they pledged themselves those fortunes should be their care. I yielded: I deserted my profession: I obeyed their wishes: I became famous—and, a ruined man! They could not dine without me; they

could not sup without me; they could not get drunk without me; no pleasure was sweet but in my company. What mattered it that, while I ministered to their amusement, I was necessarily heaping debt upon debt—accumulating miseries for future years—laying up bankruptcy, and care, and shame, and a broken heart, and an early death! But listen, Constance!—*Are you listening?—attentively?—Well! note now, I am a just man. I do not blame my noble friends, my gentle patrons, for this. No: if I were forgetful of my interests, if I preferred their pleasure to my happiness and honour, that was my crime, and I deserve the punishment! But, look you!—Time went by, and my constitution was broken; debts came upon me; I could not pay; men mistrusted my word; my name in the country fell! With my health, my genius deserted me; I was no longer useful to my party; and*

when I was on a sick bed—you remember it, Constance—the bailiffs came, and tore me away for a paltry debt—the value of one of those suppers the Prince used to beg me to give him. From that time my familiars forsook me!—not a visit, not a kind act, not a service for him whose day of work was over! Poor Vernon's character was gone!—‘Shockingly involved—could not perform his promises to his creditors—always so extravagant—quite unprincipled—must give him up!’

“In those sentences lies the secret of their conduct. They did not remember that *for* them, *by* them, the character was gone, the promises broken, the ruin incurred! They thought not how I had served them; how my best years had been devoted to advance them—to ennoble their cause in the lying page of History! All this was not thought of: my life was reduced to two epochs—that of use

to them—that not. During the first I was honoured; during the latter I was left to starve, to rot. Who freed me from prison?—who protects me now? One of my ‘party’—my ‘noble friends’—my honourable, right honourable friends?’ No! a tradesman whom I once served in my holiday, and who alone, of all the world, forgets me not in my penance. You see gratitude, friendship, spring up only in middle life; they grow not in high stations!

“And now come nearer, for my voice falters, and I would have these words distinctly heard. I see the time coming when the Aristocracy of this country must fall. Men’s minds are bent to that purpose. There shall be neither coronets, nor ermine, nor sounding titles, nor laws of entail and primogeniture. I feel what I say, as surely as ever man felt truth in the BOOK I now hold. But you,

Constance — child, girl as you are — you I consider pledged to record, to fulfil my desire — my curse! Lay your hand on mine: swear that through life to death; swear! — You speak not! repeat my words after me!” — Constance obeyed: — “through life to death; through good, through ill, through weakness, through power, you will devote yourself to humble, to abase that order from whom your father received ingratitude, mortification, and death! Swear that you will not marry a poor and powerless man, who can minister not to the ends of that solemn retribution I invoke! Swear that you will seek to marry from amongst the great; not through love, not through ambition, but through hate, and for revenge! You will seek to rise that you may humble those who have betrayed me! In the social walks of life you will delight to gall their vanities; in state-intrigues, you will em-

brace every measure that can bring them to their eternal downfall. For this great end you will pursue all means:—(What! you hesitate? Repeat, repeat, repeat!)—You will lie, cringe, fawn, and think vice not vice if it bring you one jot nearer to Revenge! With this curse on my foes I entwine my blessing, dear, dear Constance, on you; you, who have nursed, watched, all but saved me! God, God bless you, my child!” And Vernon burst into tears.

It was two hours after this singular scene, and exactly in the third hour of morning, that Vernon woke from a short and troubled sleep. The grey dawn (for the time was the height of summer) already began to labour through the shades and against the stars of night. A raw and comfortless chill crept over the earth, and saddened the air in the death-chamber. Constance sat by her father’s bed, her eyes fixed

upon him, and her cheek more wan than ever by the pale light of that crude and cheerless dawn. When Vernon woke, his eyes, glazed with death, rolled faintly toward her, fixing and dimming in their sockets as they gazed; his throat rattled. But for one moment his voice found vent; a ray shot across his countenance as he uttered his last words—words that sank at once and eternally to the core of his daughter's heart—words that ruled her life and sealed her destiny:—"Constance, remember — the Oath — Revenge!"

CHAPTER II.

REMARK ON THE TENURE OF LIFE.—THE COFFINS OF GREAT MEN SELDOM NEGLECTED.—CONSTANCE TAKES REFUGE WITH LADY ERPINGHAM.—THE HEROINE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHARACTER.—THE MANŒUVRING TEMPERAMENT.

MY God, what a strange life this is! what puppets we are! How terrible an enigma is Fate! I never set my foot without my door, but what the fearful darkness that broods over the next moment rushes upon me. How awful an event may hang over my heart! The sword is always above us, seen or invisible.

And with this life — this scene of darkness

and dread — some men would have us so contented as to desire, to ask for no other. If I were not persuaded I were immortal, I swear that I would “shuffle off” *this* perilous and weird mortality within an hour.

Constance was now without a near relation in the world. But her father predicted rightly: vanity supplied the place of affection. Vernon, who for eighteen months preceding his death had struggled with the sharpest afflictions of want — Vernon, deserted in life by all, was interred with the insulting ceremonials of pomp and state. Six nobles bore his pall: long trains of carriages attended his funeral: the journals were filled with outlines of his biography and lamentations at his decease. They buried him in Westminster Abbey, and they made subscriptions for a monument in the very best sort of marble. Lady Erpingham, a distant connexion of the deceased, invited

Constance to live with her, and Constance of course consented, for she had no alternative.

On the day that she arrived at Lady Erpingham's house, in Hill-street, there were several persons present in the drawing-room.

“ I fear, poor girl,” said Lady Erpingham, —for they were talking of Constance's expected arrival,—“ I fear that she will be quite abashed by seeing so many of us, and under such unhappy circumstances.”

“ How old is she ?” asked a beauty.

“ About thirteen, I believe.”

“ Handsome ?”

“ I have not seen her since she was seven years old. She promised then to be very beautiful: but she was a remarkably shy, silent child.”

“ Miss Vernon,” said the groom of the chamber, throwing open the door of the room.

With the slow step and self-possessed air

of womanhood, but with a far haughtier and far colder mien than women commonly assume, Constance Vernon walked through the long apartment, and greeted her future guardian. Though every eye was on her, she did not blush ; though the Queens of the London World were round her, her gait and air were more royal than all. Every one present experienced a revulsion of feeling. They were prepared for pity : this was no case in which pity could be given. Even the words of protection died on Lady Erpingham's lip, and *she* it was who felt bashful and disconcerted.

I intend to pass rapidly over the years that elapsed till Constance became a woman. Let us glance at her education. Vernon had not only had her instructed in the French and Italian ; but, a deep and impassioned scholar himself, he had taught her the elements of the two great languages of the ancient world.

The treasures of those languages she afterwards conquered of her own accord.

Lady Erpingham had one daughter, who married when Constance had reached the age of sixteen. The advantages Lady Eleanor Erpingham possessed in her masters and her governess, Constance shared. Miss Vernon drew well, and sang divinely ; but she made no very great proficiency in the science of music. To say truth, her mind was somewhat too stern, and somewhat too intent on other subjects, to surrender to that most jealous of accomplishments the exclusive devotion it requires.

But of all her attractions, and of all the evidences of her cultivated mind, none equalled the extraordinary grace of her conversation. Wholly disregarding the conventional leading-strings in which the minds of young ladies are accustomed to be held ;—leading-strings,

disguised by the name of "proper diffidence," and "becoming modesty,"—she never scrupled to share, nay, to lead, discussions even of a grave and solid nature. Still less did she scruple to invest the common trifles that make the sum of conversation with the fascinations of a wit, which, playful yet deep, rivalled even the paternal source from which it was inherited.

It seems sometimes odd enough to me, that while young ladies are so sedulously taught all the accomplishments that a husband disregards, they are never taught the great one he would prize. They are taught to be *exhibitors*; he wants a *companion*. He wants neither a singing animal, nor a drawing animal, nor a dancing animal; he wants a talking animal. But to talk they are never taught; all they know of it is slander, and that "comes by nature."

But Constance *did* talk *beautifully* : not like a pedant, or a *blue*, or a French woman. A child would have been as much charmed with her as a *sçavant* ; but *both* would have been charmed. Her father's eloquence had descended to her ; but in him eloquence commanded ; in her it won. There was another trait she possessed in common with her father : Vernon, (as most disappointed men are wont,) had done the world injustice by his accusations. It was not his poverty and his distresses alone which had induced his party to look coolly on his declining day. They were not without some apparent excuse for desertion—they doubted his *sincerity*. It is true, that it was without actual cause. No modern politician had ever been more consistent. He had refused bribes, though poor—and place, though ambitious. But he was essentially—here is the secret—essentially an *intrigant*. Bred in

the old school of policy, he thought manœuvring wisdom, and duplicity the art of governing. Like Lysander,* he loved plotting, yet neglected self-interest. There was not a man less open, or more honest. This character, so rare in all countries, is especially so in England. Your blunt 'squires, your politicians at Bellamy's, do not comprehend it. They saw in Vernon the arts which deceive enemies, and they dreaded lest, though his friends, they themselves should be deceived. This disposition, so fatal to Vernon, his daughter inherited. With a dark, bold, and passionate genius, that in a man would have led to the highest enterprises, she linked the feminine love of secrecy and scheming. To borrow again from Plutarch and Lysander, "When the skin of the lion fell short, she was quite of opinion that it should be eked out with the fox's."

* Plutarch's *Life of Lysander*.

CHAPTER III.

THE HERO INTRODUCED TO OUR READER'S NOTICE.—
DIALOGUE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS FATHER.—
PERCY GODOLPHIN'S CHARACTER AS A BOY.—THE
CATASTROPHE OF HIS SCHOOL LIFE.

“PERCY, remember that it is to-morrow you will return to school,” said Mr. Godolphin to his only son.

Percy pouted, and after a momentary silence, replied, “No, father, I think I shall go to Mr. Saville's. He has asked me to spend a month with him, and he says rightly, that I shall learn more with him than at Dr. Shallowell's, where I am already head of the sixth form.”

“ Mr. Saville is a coxcomb, and you are another !” replied the father, who dressed in an old flannel dressing-gown, with a worn velvet cap on his head, and cowering gloomily over a wretched fire, seemed no bad personification of that mixture of half hypochondriac, half miser, which he was in reality :—“ Don’t talk to me of going to town, Sir, or——”

“ Father,” interrupted Percy, in a cool and *nonchalant* tone, as he folded his arms, and looked straight and shrewdly on the paternal face ; “ Father, let us understand each other. My schooling, I suppose, is rather an expensive affair ?”

“ You may well say that, Sir ! Expensive ! it is frightful, horrible, ruinous ! Expensive ! Twenty pounds a-year, board and Latin ; five guineas washing ; five more writing and arithmetic. Sir, if I were not resolved that you should not want education, though

you may want fortune, I should—yes, I should—What do you mean, Sir?—you are laughing! Is this your respect, your gratitude to your father?”

A slight shade fell over the bright and intelligent countenance of the boy.

“Don’t let us talk of gratitude,” said he, sadly; “God knows what either you or I have to be grateful for! Fortune has left to your proud name but these bare walls and a handful of barren acres; to me she gave a father’s affection—not such as Nature had made it, but cramped and soured by misfortunes.”

Here Percy paused, and his father seemed also struck and affected. “Let us,” renewed, in a lighter strain, this singular boy, who might have passed by some months his fifteenth year, “let us see if we cannot accommodate matters to our mutual satisfaction. You can ill afford my schooling, and I am

resolved that at school I will not stay. Saville is a relation of ours; he has taken a fancy to me; he has even hinted that he may leave me his fortune; and he has promised, at least, to afford me a home and his tuition as long as I like. Give me free passport, hereafter, to come and go as I list—and I, in turn, will engage never to cost you another shilling. Come, Sir, shall it be a compact?”

“You wound me, Percy,” said the father, with a mournful pride in his tone; “I have not deserved this, at least from you. You know not, boy—you know not all that has hardened this heart; but to you it has *not* been hard, and a taunt from you—yes, that *is* the serpent’s tooth!”

Percy in an instant was at his father’s feet; he seized both his hands, and burst into a passionate fit of tears. “Forgive me,” he said in broken words; “I—I meant not to taunt

you. I am but a giddy boy! send me to school! do with me as you will!"

"Ay," said the old man, shaking his head gently, "you know not what pain a son's bitter word can send to a parent's heart. But it is all natural, perfectly natural! You would reproach me with a love of money; it is the sin youth is least lenient to. But what! can I look round the world and not see its value, its necessity? Year after year, from my first manhood, I have toiled and toiled to preserve from the hammer these last remnants of my ancestors' domains. Year after year fortune has slipped from my grasp; and after all my efforts, and towards the close of a long life, I stand on the very verge of penury. But you cannot tell—no man whose heart is not seamed with many years, can tell, or can appreciate the motives that have formed my character. You, however," and his voice softened as he laid his

hand on his son's head—"you, however,—the gay, the bold, the young,—should not have your brow crossed and your eye dimmed by the cares that surround me. Go! I will accompany you to town; I will see Saville myself. If he be one with whom my son can, at so tender an age, be safely trusted, you shall pay him the visit you wish."

Percy would have replied, but his father checked him; and before the end of the evening, the father had resolved to forget as much as he pleased of the conversation.

The elder Godolphin was one of those characters on whom it is vain to attempt making a permanent impression. The habits of his mind were durably formed: like waters, they yielded to any sudden intrusion, but closed instantly again. Early in life he had been taught that he ought to marry an heiress for the benefit of his estate—his long, ancestral

estate, which he had been bred to consider the grand object and ambition of life. His views had been strangely baffled ; but the more they were thwarted, the more pertinaciously he clung to them. Naturally kind, generous, and social, he had sunk at length into the solitary and the miser. All other speculations that should retrieve his ancestral honours had failed : but there is one speculation that never fails—the speculation of *saving!* It was to this that he now indissolubly attached himself. At moments he was open to all his old habits ; but those moments were rare and few. A cold, hard, frosty penuriousness was his prevalent characteristic. He had sent his son, with eighteen-pence in his pocket, to a school of twenty pounds a-year ; where, naturally enough, he learnt nothing but mischief and cricket : yet he conceived his son owed him the most eternal obligations.

Luckily for Percy, he was an especial favourite with a certain not uncelebrated character of the name of Saville; and Saville claimed the privilege of a relation, to supply him with money and receive him at his home. Wild, passionate, fond to excess of pleasure, the young Godolphin caught eagerly at these occasional visits; and at each his mind, keen and penetrating as it naturally was, took new flights and revelled in new views. He was already the leader of his school, the torment of the master, and the lover of the master's daughter. He was fifteen years old, but a character. A secret pride, a secret bitterness, and an open wit and recklessness of bearing, rendered him to all seeming a boy more endowed with energies than affections. Yet a kind word from a friend's lips was never without its effect on him, and he might have been led by the silk while he would have snapped the chain.

But these were his boyish traits of mind: the world soon altered them.

The subject of the visit to Saville was not touched upon. A little reflection showed Mr. Godolphin how nugatory were the promises of a schoolboy that he should not cost his father another shilling; and he knew that Saville's house was not exactly the spot in which economy was best learned. He thought it, therefore, more prudent that his son should return to school.

To school went Percy Godolphin; and about three weeks afterwards, Percy Godolphin was condemned to expulsion for returning, with considerable unction, a slap in the face that he had received from Dr. Shallowell. Instead of waiting for his father's arrival, Percy made up a small bundle of clothes, and let himself drop, by the help of the bed-curtains, from the window of the room in which he was con-

fined, and towards the close of a fine summer's evening, found himself on the high-road between — and London, with independence at his heart and (Saville's last gift) ten guineas in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

PERCY'S FIRST ADVENTURE AS A FREE AGENT.

IT was a fine, picturesque outline of road on which the young outcast found himself journeying, whither he nor knew nor cared. His heart was full of enterprise and the unfledged valour of inexperience. He had proceeded several miles, and the dusk of the evening was setting in, when he observed a caravan a little a-head of him, and a tall, well-shaped man walking alongside of it, and gesticulating somewhat violently. Godolphin observed him with some curiosity; and the man, turning

abruptly round, perceived, and in his turn noticed very inquisitively, the person and aspect of the young traveller.

“And how now?” said he, presently, and in an agreeable though familiar and unceremonious tone of voice; “whither are you bound this time of day?”

“It is no business of yours, friend,” said the boy, with the proud petulance of his age; “mind what belongs to yourself.”

“You are sharp on me, young Sir,” returned the other: “but it is our business to be loquacious. Know, Sir,”—and the stranger frowned—“that we have ordered many a taller fellow than yourself to execution, for a much smaller insolence than you seem capable of.”

A laugh from the caravan caused Godolphin to lift up his eyes, and he saw the door of the machine open, and an arch female face looking down on him.

“You are merry on me, I see,” said Percy;

“come down, and I’ll be even with you, pretty one.”

The lady laughed yet more loudly at the premature gallantry of the traveller: but the man, without heeding her, and laying his hand on Percy’s shoulder, said:—

“Pray, Sir, do you live at ——?” naming the town they were now approaching.

“Not I,” said Godolphin, freeing himself from the intrusion.

“You will perhaps sleep there?”

“Perhaps I shall.”

“You are too young to travel alone.”

“And you too old to make such impertinent remarks,” retorted Godolphin, reddening with anger.

“Faith, I like this spirit, my Hotspur,” said the stranger, coolly: “If you are really going to put up for the night at ——, suppose we sup together.”

“With your wild beasts, friend, I suppose

as a part of the company. You are a showman, I presume; and you carry three snakes coiled in flannel, a white bear, and some half-a-dozen monkeys in that caravan, as a decoy to the groundlings.”

“And which of those beasts am I, Sir?” said the damsel above, very demurely.

Percy, struck (at fifteen we are easily inflammable,) with the face of the inquirer, was about to reply complimentarily, when suddenly a voice from the interior of the vehicle cried out:—

“Make haste! help! help! the cord’s given way!—Venice is falling out of its place, and the snow-storm will be in the fire in an instant!”

“The devil!” cried the tall man; and he sprang up the steps into the caravan, and disappeared. The damsel who had before mixed in the conversation remained, however, quite

quiet and undisturbed at the door of the machine; and Percy felt that there was an opportunity for a flirtation.

“I beg pardon,” said he, after a pause; “I perceive my error; I see now that it is some theatre which you adorn.”

“*Some* theatre! Ah! we are pretty impartial as to that,” answered the damsel coolly; “in short, we are a party of strollers.”

“And is that gentleman, so free and easy in his manners, your husband?”

“Heaven forbid! Do you think he would let me stand idle while he was busy, if he were? But, pooh! what can you know of married life? No!” she continued, with a pretty air of mock dignity; “I am the *Belvidera*, the *Calista*, the *Prima donna*, of the company;—above all control, all husbanding, and reaping thirty-three shillings a-week.”

“But are you above lovers as well as hus-

bands?" asked Percy, with a rakish air, borrowed from Saville.

"Bless the boy! No: but then my lovers must be at least as tall, and at least as rich, and I am afraid, at least as old, as myself."

"Don't frighten yourself, my dear," returned Percy; *I* was not about to make love to you."

"Were you not? Yes you were, and you know it. But why won't you sup with us?"

"Why not, indeed?" thought Percy, as the idea, thus more enticingly put than it was at first, pressed upon him. "If *you* ask me," said he, "I will."

"I *do* ask you, then," said the actress; and here the hero of the company re-appeared.

"So, Sir," said he to Godolphin, "you have not left us, then, I find."

"Not I: I am going to accept your invitation, and sup with you."

“Very well; I am glad to hear it. Had you not better mount, and rest yourself in the caravan? We have two miles farther to — yet.”

Percy accepted the invitation, and was soon by the side of the pretty actress. And thus, fast growing familiarized to his new companions, and delighted with his adventure, the son of the ascetic Godolphin, the pupil of the courtly Saville, entered the town of —, and commenced his first independent campaign in *the great world*.

CHAPTER V.

THE MUMMERS.—GODOLPHIN IN LOVE.—THE EFFECT OF FANNY MILLINGER'S ACTING UPON HIM.—THE TWO OFFERS.—GODOLPHIN QUITS THE PLAYERS.

OUR travellers stopped at the first inn in the outskirts of the town. Here they were shown into a large room on the ground-floor, sanded, with a long table in the centre; and Percy had leisure to examine all the companions with whom he had associated himself.

In the first place, there was an old gentleman, of the age of sixty-three, in a bob-wig, and inclined to be stout, who always played the *lover*. He was equally excellent

in the pensive *Romeo* and the bustling *Rapid*. He had an ill way of talking off the stage, partly because he had lost all his front teeth; a circumstance which made him avoid, in general, those parts in which he had to force a great deal of laughter. Next, there was a little girl, of about fourteen, who played angels, fairies, and at a pinch, was very effective as an old woman. Thirdly, there was our free-and-easy cavalier, who, having a loud voice and a manly presence, usually performed the tyrant. He was great in "Macbeth," greater in "Bombastes Furioso." Fourthly, came this gentleman's wife, a pretty, slatternish woman, much painted. She usually performed the second female—the confidant, the chambermaid—the *Emilia* to the *Desdemona*. And fifthly, was Percy's new inamorata,—a girl of about one-and-twenty, fair, with a *nez retroussé*; beautiful auburn hair, that was al-

ways a little dishevelled ; the prettiest mouth, teeth, and dimple imaginable ; a natural colour ; and a person that promised to incline hereafter towards that *embonpoint* which is more dear to the sensual than the imaginative. This girl, whose name was Fanny Millinger, was of so frank, good-humoured, and lively a turn, that she was the idol of the whole company, and her superiority in acting was never made a matter of jealousy. Actors may believe this, or not, as they please.

“ But is this all your company ? ” said Percy.

“ All ? no ! ” replied Fanny, taking off her bonnet, and curling up her tresses by the help of a dim glass. “ The rest are at * * * * *, but will join us to-night. Why won't *you* take to the stage ? I wish you would ! you would make a very respectable—page.”

“ Upon my word ! ” said Percy, exceedingly offended.

“ Come, come ! ” cried the actress, slapping her hands, and perfectly unheeding his displeasure—“ Why don’t you help me off with my cloak ?—why don’t you set me a chair ?—why don’t you take this great box out of my way ?—why don’t you—Heaven help me ! ” and she stamped her little foot quite seriously on the floor. “ A pretty person for a lover you are ! ”

“ Oho ! then I *am* a lover, you acknowledge ? ”

“ Nonsense !—get a chair next me at supper. ”

The young Godolphin was perfectly fascinated by the lively actress ; and it was with no small interest that he stationed himself, the following night, in the stage-box of the little theatre at —, to see how his Fanny acted. The play was “ She Stoops to Conquer. ” The

male parts were, on the whole, respectably managed; though Percy was somewhat surprised to observe that a man, who had joined the corps that morning, blest with the most solemn countenance in the world—a fine Roman nose, and a forehead like a sage’s—was now dressed in nankeen tights, and a coat without skirts, splitting the sides of the gallery in the part of *Tony Lumpkin*. But into the heroine Fanny Millinger threw a grace, a sweetness, a simple yet dignified spirit of true love, that at once charmed and astonished all present. The applause was unbounded; and Percy Godolphin felt proud of himself for having admired one whom every one else seemed also resolved upon admiring.

When the comedy was finished, he went behind the scenes, and for the first time felt the rank which intellect bestows. This idle girl, with whom he had before been so familiar;

who had seemed to him, boy as he was, only made for jesting, and coquetry, and trifling, he now felt to be raised to a sudden eminence that startled and abashed him. He became shy and awkward, and stood at a distance, stealing a glance towards her, but without the courage to approach and compliment her.

The quick eye of the actress detected the effect she had produced. She was naturally pleased at it, and coming up to Godolphin, she touched his shoulder, and with a smile, rendered still more brilliant by the rouge yet unwashed from the dimpled cheeks, said—
“ Well, most awkward swain! no flattery ready for me? Go to! you won't suit me: get yourself another empress!”

“ You have pleased me into respecting you,” said Godolphin.

There was a delicacy in the expression that was very characteristic of the real mind of the

speaker, though that mind was not yet developed; and the pretty actress was touched by it at the moment, though, despite the grace of her acting, she was by nature far too volatile to think it at all advantageous to be *respected* on the long run. She did not act in the after-piece, and Godolphin escorted her home to the inn.

So long as his ten guineas lasted—which the reader will conceive was not very long—Godolphin stayed with the gay troop, as the welcome and successful lover of its chief ornament. To her he confided his name and history: she laughed heartily at the latter—for she was one of Venus's true children, fond of striking mirth out of all subjects. “But what,” said she, patting his cheek affectionately, “what should hinder you from joining us for a little while? I could teach you to be an actor in three lessons. Come now, attend! It is but a mere

series of tricks, this art that seems to you so admirable.”

Godolphin grew embarrassed. There was in him a sort of hidden pride, that could never endure to subject itself to the censure of others. He had no propensity to imitation, and he had a strong susceptibility to the ridiculous. These traits of mind thus early developed—which in later life prevented his ever finding fit scope for his natural powers—which made him too proud to bustle and too philosophical to shine—were of service to him on this occasion, and preserved him from the danger into which he had fallen. He could not be persuaded to act: the fair Fanny gave up the attempt in despair. “Yet stay with us,” said she tenderly, “and share my poor earnings.”

Godolphin started; and in the wonderful contradictions of the proud human heart, this generous offer from the poor actress gave him

a distaste, a displeasure, that almost reconciled him to parting from her. It seemed to open to him at once the equivocal mode of life he had entered upon. "No, Fanny," said he, after a pause: "I am here because I resolved to be independent; I cannot, therefore, choose dependence."

"Miss Millinger is wanted instantly for rehearsal," said the little girl who acted fairies and old women, putting her head suddenly into the room.

"Bless me!" cried Fanny, starting up, "is it so late? Well, I must go now: good-bye! look in upon us—do."

But Godolphin, moody and thoughtful, walked into the street; and lo! the first thing that greeted his eyes was a handbill on the wall, describing his own person, and offering twenty guineas reward for his detention. "Let him return to his afflicted parent," was the

conclusion of the bill, “and all shall be forgiven.”

Godolphin crept back to his apartment; wrote a long, affectionate letter to Fanny; enclosed her his watch, as the only keepsake in his power; gave her his address at Saville’s; and then waiting till dark, once more sallied forth, and took a place on the mail for London. He had no money for his passage, but his appearance was such that the coachman readily trusted him; and the next morning at daybreak he was under Saville’s roof.

CHAPTER VI.

PERCY GODOLPHIN THE GUEST OF SAVILLE.—HE ENTERS THE LIFE-GUARDS, AND BECOMES *du bon ton*.

“AND so,” said Saville laughing, “you really gave them the slip: excellent! But I envy you your adventures with the player-folk. Gad! if I were some years younger, I would join them myself; I should act *Sir Pertinax Macsycophant* famously; I have a touch of the mime in me. Well! but what do you propose to do?—live with me?—eh!”

“Why, I think that might be the best; and certainly it would be the pleasantest mode of passing my life. But——”

“ But what ? ”

“ Why, I can scarcely quarter myself on your courtesy ; I should soon grow discontented. So I shall write to my father, whom I, kindly and considerately, by the way, informed of my safety the very first day of my arrival in ——. I told him to direct his letters to your house ; but I regret to find that the handbill which so frightened me from my propriety is the only notice he has deigned to take of my whereabouts. I shall write to him therefore again, begging him to let me enter the army. It is not a profession I much fancy ; but what then ? I shall be my own master.”

“ Very well said ! ” answered Saville ; “ and here I hope I can serve you. If your father will pay the lawful sum for a commission in the Guards, why, I think I have interest to get you in for that sum alone—no trifling favour.”

Godolphin was enchanted at this proposal, and instantly wrote to his father, urging it strongly upon him, Saville, in a separate epistle, seconded the motion. "You see," wrote the latter,—“you see, my dear Sir, that your son is a wild, resolute scapegrace. You can do nothing with him by schools and coercion: put him to discipline in the King's service, and condemn him to live on his pay. It is a cheap mode, after all, of providing for a reprobate; and as he will have the good fortune to enter the army at so early an age, by the time he is thirty, he may be a colonel on full-pay. Seriously, this is the best thing you can do with him, unless you have a living in your family.”

The old gentleman was much discomposed by these letters, and by his son's previous elopement. He could not, however, but foresee, that if he resisted the boy's wishes, he

was likely to have a troublesome time of it. Scrape after scrape, difficulty following difficulty might ensue, all costing both anxiety and money. The present offer furnished him with a fair excuse for ridding himself, for a long time to come, of farther provision for his offspring; and now growing daily more and more attached to the indolent routine of solitary economies in which he moved, he was glad of an opportunity to deliver himself from future interruption, and surrender his whole soul to his favourite occupation.

At length, after a fortnight's delay and meditation, he wrote shortly to Saville and his son; saying, after much reproach to the latter, that if the commission could really be purchased at the sum specified, he was willing to make a sacrifice, for which he must pinch himself, and conclude the business. This touched the son, but Saville laughed him out of the

twinge of good feeling; and very shortly afterwards, Percy Godolphin was gazetted as a cornet in the — Life-Guards.

The life of a soldier, in peace, is indolent enough, Heaven knows! Percy liked the new uniforms and the new horses—all of which were bought on credit. He liked his new companions; he liked balls; he liked flirting; he did not dislike Hyde Park from four o'clock till six; and he was not very much bored by drills and parade. It was much to his credit in the world that he was the *protégé* of a man who had so great a character for profligacy and gambling as Augustus Saville; and under such auspices he found himself launched at once into the full tide of “good society!”—so called, because all goodness is carefully banished from its precincts.

Young, romantic, high-spirited — with the classic features of an Antinous, and a very

pretty knack of complimenting and writing verses—Percy Godolphin soon became, while yet more fit in years for the nursery than the world, “the curled darling” of that wide class of high-born women who have nothing to do but to hear love made to them, and who, all artifice themselves, think the love sweetest which springs from the most natural source. They like boyhood when it is not bashful; and from fifteen to twenty, it is our own fault if we all of us cannot play the *Juan*.

But love was not the worst danger that menaced the intoxicated boy. Saville, the most seductive of tutors; Saville, who in his wit, his *bon-ton*, his control over the great world, seemed as a god to all less elevated and less aspiring—Saville was Godolphin’s constant companion; and Saville was worse than a profligate—he was a gambler! One would think that gaming was the last vice that could fasci-

nate the young: its avarice, its grasping, its hideous selfishness, its cold, calculating meanness, would, one might imagine, scare away all who have yet other and softer duties to worship. But, in fact, the fault of youth is, that it can rarely resist. Gaming, in all countries, is the vice of an aristocracy. The young find it already established in the best circles; they are enticed by the habit of others, and ruined when the habit becomes their own.

“ You look feverish, Percy,” said Saville, as he met his pupil in the Park. “ I don’t wonder at it: you lost infernally last night.”

“ More than I can pay,” replied Percy, with a quivering lip.

“ No! you shall pay it to-morrow, for you shall go shares with me to-night. Observe,” continued Saville, lowering his voice, “ *I never lose.*”

“ How ! *never?* ”

“ Never, unless by design. I play at no game where chance only presides. Whist is my favourite play : it is not popular : I am sorry for it. I take up with other games, I am forced to do it ; but even at *rouge et noir*, I carry about with me the rules of whist. I calculate—I remember.”

“ But *hazard?* ”

“ I never play at that ! ” said Saville, solemnly. “ It is the devil’s game ; it defies skill. Forsake *hazard*, and let me teach you *écarté* ; it is coming into fashion.”

Saville took great pains with Godolphin : and Godolphin, who was by nature of a contemplative, not hasty mood, was no superficial disciple. He became a wise, a fortunate gamester ; and thus he eked out betimes the slender profits of a subaltern’s pay.

This was the first great moral deterioration

in Percy's mind—a mind which ought to have made him a very different being from what he became, but which no vice, no evil example, could ever entirely pervert.

CHAPTER VII.

SAVILLE EXCUSED FROM HAVING HUMAN AFFECTIONS.
—GODOLPHIN SEES ONE WHOM HE NEVER SEES
AGAIN.—THE NEW ACTRESS.

SAVILLE was deemed the consummate man of the world—wise and heartless. How came he to take such gratuitous pains with the boy Godolphin? In the first place, Saville had no legitimate children; Godolphin was his relation: in the second place, it may be observed, that hacknied and *blasés* men of the world are fond of the young, in whom they recognise something—a better something—belonging to themselves. In Godolphin's gentle-

ness and courage, Saville thought he saw the mirror of his own crusted urbanity and scheming perseverance: in Godolphin's fine imagination and deep intellect, he beheld his own cunning and hypocrisy. The boy's popularity flattered him; the boy's conversation amused. No man is so heartless but that he is capable of strong likings, when they do not put him much out of his way: it was this sort of liking that Saville had for Godolphin. Besides, there was yet another reason for attachment, which might at first seem too delicate to actuate the refined voluptuary; but examined closely, the delicacy vanished. Saville had loved,—at least, had offered his hand to Godolphin's mother: (she was supposed an heiress). He thought he had just missed being Godolphin's father: his vanity made him like to show the boy what a much better father he would have been than the one that

Providence had given him. His resentment, too, against the accepted suitor made him love to exercise a little spiteful revenge against Godolphin's father: he was glad to show that the son preferred where the mother rejected. All these motives combined made Saville take, as it were, to the young Percy; and being rich, and habitually profuse, though prudent, and a shrewd speculator withal, the pecuniary part of his kindness cost him no pain. But Godolphin, who was not ostentatious, did not trust himself largely to the capricious fount of the worldling's generosity. Fortune smiled on her boyish votary; and during the short time he was obliged to cultivate her favours, showered on him, at least, a sufficiency for support, or even for display.

Crowded with fine people, and blazing with light, were the rooms of the Countess of B—, as flushed from a late dinner at Saville's,

young Godolphin made his appearance in the scene. He was not of those numerous gentlemen, the stock-flowers of the parterre, who stick themselves up against walls in the panoply of neckclothed silence. He came not to balls, from the vulgar motive of being seen there in the most conspicuous situation—a motive so apparent among the stiff exquisites of England. He came to amuse himself; and if he found no one capable of amusing him, he saw no necessity in staying. He was always seen, therefore, conversing, or dancing, or listening to music—or he was not seen at all.

In exchanging a few words with a Colonel D——, a noted *roué* and gamester, he observed, gazing on him very intently—and as Percy thought, very rudely—an old gentleman in a dress of the last century. Turn where he would, Godolphin could not rid himself of the gaze; so at length he met it with a look of

equal scrutiny and courage. The old gentleman slowly approached. "Percy Godolphin, I think?" said he.

"That is *my* name, Sir," replied Percy. "Your's——"

"No matter! Yet stay! you shall know it. I am Henry Johnstone; old Harry Johnstone. You have heard of him?—your father's first cousin. Well, I grieve, young sir, to find that you associate with that rascal Saville.—Nay, never interrupt me, Sir!—I grieve to find that you, thus young, thus unguarded, are left to be ruined in heart and corrupted in nature by any one who will take the trouble! Yet, I like your countenance!—I like your countenance!—it is open, yet thoughtful; frank, and yet it has something of melancholy. You have not Charles's coloured hair; but you are much younger—much. I am glad I have seen you; I came here on purpose:

Good night !”—and without waiting an answer, the old man disappeared.

Godolphin, recovering his surprise, recollected that he had often heard his father speak of a rich and eccentric relation named Johnstone: this singular interview made a strong, but momentary impression on him. He intended to seek out the old man's residence; but one thing or another drove away the fulfilment of the intention, and in this world the relations never met again.

Percy, now musingly gliding through the crowd, sank into a seat beside a lady of forty-five, who sometimes amused herself in making love to him—because there could be no harm in such a mere boy!—and presently afterwards, a Lord George Somebody, sauntering up, asked the lady if he had not seen her at the play on the previous night.

“ Oh yes! we went to see the new actress.

How pretty she is!—so unaffected too;—how well she sings!”

“ Pretty well—er!” replied Lord George, passing his hand through his hair. “ Very nice girl—er!—good ankles. Devilish hot—er, is not it—er—er? What a bore this is: eh! Ah! Godolphin! don’t forget Wattier’s—er!” His Lordship *er’d* himself off.

“ What actress is this?”

“ Oh, a very good one indeed!—came out in ‘The Belle’s Stratagem.’ We are going to see her to-morrow: will you dine with us early, and be our cavalier?”

“ Nothing will please me more! Your Ladyship has dropped your handkerchief.”

“ Thank you!” said the lady, bending till her hair touched Godolphin’s cheek, and gently pressing the hand that was extended to her. It was a wonder that Godolphin never became a coxcomb.

He dined the next day according to appointment: he went to the play; and at the moment his eye first turned to the stage, an universal burst of applause indicated the *entré* of the new actress—Fanny Millinger!

CHAPTER VIII.

GODOLPHIN'S PASSION FOR THE STAGE.—THE DIFFERENCE IT ENGENDERED IN HIS HABITS OF LIFE.

NOW this event produced a great influence over Godolphin's habits—and I suppose, therefore, I may add, over his character. He renewed his acquaintance with the lively actress.

“What a change!” cried both.

“The strolling player risen into celebrity!”

“And the runaway boy polished into fashion!”

“You are handsomer than ever, Fanny.”

“I return the compliment,” replied Fanny, with a curtsy.

And now Godolphin became a constant attendant at the theatre. This led him into a mode of life quite different from that which he had lately cultivated.

There are in London two sets of dissipated men: one set, the butterflies of balls; the loungers of the regular walks of society; diners-out; the "old familiar faces," seen everywhere, known to every one: the other set, a more wild, irregular, careless race of men, who go little into parties, and vote balls a nuisance; who live in clubs; frequent theatres; drive about late o' nights in mysterious-looking vehicles, and enjoy a vast acquaintance among the Aspasia's of pleasure. These are the men who are the critics of theatricals: black-neckclothed and unilaterally hatted, they sit in their boxes and decide on the ankles of a dancer or the voice of a singer. They have a smattering of literature, and use a great deal

of French in their conversation: they have something of romance in their composition, and have been known to marry for love. In short, there is in their whole nature a more roving, liberal, Continental character of dissipation than belongs to the cold, tame, dull, prim, hedge-clipped debaucheries of more national exclusivism. Into this set, out of the other set, fell young Godolphin; and oh! the merry mornings at actresses' houses; the jovial suppers after the play; the buoyancy, the brilliancy, the *esprit*, with which the hours, from midnight to cock-crow, were often pelted with rose-leaves and drowned in Rhenish.

By degrees, however, as Godolphin warmed into his attendance at the playhouses, the fine intellectual something that lay yet undestroyed at his heart, stirred up emotions which he felt his more vulgar associates were unfitted to share.

There is that in theatrical representation which perpetually awakens whatever romance belongs to our character. The magic lights; the pomp of scene; the palace, the camp; the forest; the midnight wold; the imaged moonlight on the water; the melody of the tragic rhythm; the grace of the comic wit; the strange art that gives such meaning to the poet's lightest word;—the fair, false, exciting life that is detailed before us—crowding into some three little hours all that our most busy ambition could desire—love, enterprise, war, glory! the kindling exaggeration of the sentiments which belong to the stage—like our own in our boldest moments: all these appeals to our imaginative sense are not made in vain. Our taste for castle-building and visions deepens upon us; and we chew a mental opium which stagnates all the other faculties, but wakens that of the ideal.

Godolphin was peculiarly fascinated by the

stage; he loved to steal away from his companions, and, alone and unheeded, to feast his mind on the unreal stream of existence that mirrored images so beautiful. And oh! while yet we are young—while yet the dew lingers on the green leaf of spring—while all the brighter, the more enterprising part of the future is to come—while we know not whether the true life may not be visionary and excited as the false—how deep and rich a transport is it to see, to feel, to hear Shakspeare's conceptions made palpable, though all imperfectly, and only for an hour! Sweet Arden! are we in thy forest?—thy “shadowy groves and unfrequented glens?” Rosalind, Jacques, Orlando, have you indeed a being upon earth? Ah! this is true enchantment! and when we turn back to life, we turn from the colours which the Claude glass breathes over a winter's landscape to the nakedness of the landscape itself!

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEGACY.—A NEW DEFORMITY IN SAVILLE.—THE NATURE OF WORLDLY *liaisons*.—GODOLPHIN LEAVES ENGLAND.

BUT then, it is not always a sustainer of the stage delusion to have an actress for a mistress: it takes us too much behind the scenes. Godolphin felt this so strongly that he liked those plays least in which Fanny performed. He knew so well that she was a woman, that he could not deceive himself into believing her more. Luckily, however, Fanny did not attempt Shakspeare. She was inimitable in vaudeville, in farce, and in the lighter come-

dy ; but she had prudently abandoned tragedy in deserting the barn. She was a girl of much talent and quickness, and discovered exactly the paths in which her vanity could walk without being wounded. And there was a simplicity, a frankness, about her manner, that made her a most agreeable companion.

The attachment between her and Godolphin was not very violent ; it was a silken tie, which opportunity could knot and snap a hundred times over without doing much wrong to the hearts it so lightly united. Over Godolphin the attachment had no influence, while the *effects* of the attachment had an influence so great.

One night, after an absence from town of two or three days, Godolphin returned home from the theatre, and found among the letters waiting his arrival one from his father. It was edged with black ; the seal, too, was black.

Godolphin's heart misgave him: tremblingly he opened it, and read as follows—

“ DEAR PERCY :

“ I have news for you, which I do not know whether I should call good or bad. On the one hand, your cousin, that old oddity, Harry Johnstone, is dead, and has left you, out of his immense fortune, the poor sum of twenty thousand pounds. But mark! on condition that you leave the Guards, and either reside with me, or at least leave London till your majority is attained. If you refuse these conditions, you lose the legacy. It is rather strange that this curious character should take such pains with your morals, and yet not leave *me* a single shilling. But justice is out of fashion now-a-days; your showy virtues only are the rage. I beg, if you choose to come down here, that you will get me twelve yards of house-flannel;

I enclose a pattern of the quality. Snugg, in Oxford-street, near Tottenham-court-road, is my man. It is certainly a handsome thing in old Johnstone: but so odd to omit me. How did you get acquainted with him? The twenty thousand pounds will, however, do much for the poor property. Pray take care of it, Percy, pray do.

“ I have had a touch of the gout, for the first time. I have been too luxurious: by proper abstinence, I trust to bring it down. Compliments to that smooth rogue Saville.

“ Your affectionate,

“ A. G.”

“ P. S.—Discharged Old Sally for flirting with the butcher’s boy: flirtations of that sort make meat weigh much heavier. Bess is my only she-helpmate now, besides the old creature who shows the ruins: so much the better. What an eccentric creature that Johnstone was! I hate eccentric people.”

The letter fell from Percy's hands. And this, then, was the issue of his single interview with the poor old man! It was events like these, wayward and strange, (events which chequered his whole life,) that, secretly to himself, tinged Godolphin's character with superstition. He afterwards dealt *con amore* with fatalities and influences.

You may be sure that he did not sleep much that night. Early the next morning he sought Saville, and imparted to him the intelligence he had received.

“Droll enough!” said Saville, languidly, and more than a little displeased at this generosity to Godolphin from another; for, like all small-hearted persons, he was jealous; “droll enough! Hem! and you never knew him but once, and then he abused me. I wonder at that; I was very obliging to his vulgar son.”

“ What, he had a son, then ?”

“ Some two-legged creature of that sort, raw and bony, dropped into London, like a ptarmigan, wild, and scared out of his wits. Old Johnstone was in the country, taking care of his wife, who had lost the use of her limbs ever since she had been married:—caught a violent—husband—the first day of wedlock. The boy, sole son and heir, came up to Town at the age of discretion; got introduced to me; I patronized him; brought him into a decent degree of fashion; played a few games at cards with him; won some money; would not win any more; advised him to leave off; too young to play; neglected my advice; went on, and—damn the fellow! if he did not cut his throat one morning; and the father, to my astonishment, laid the blame upon me!”

Godolphin stood appalled in speechless disgust. He never *loved* Saville from that hour.

“In fact,” resumed Saville carelessly, “he had lost very considerably. His father was a stern, hard man, and the poor boy was frightened at the thought of his displeasure. I suppose Monsieur Papa imagines me a sort of moral ogre, eating up all the little youths that fall in my way! since he leaves you twenty thousand pounds, on condition that you take care of yourself, and shun the castle I live in. Well, well! ’tis all very flattering! And where will you go? To Spain?”

This story affected Percy sensibly. He regretted deeply that he had not sought out the bereaved father, and been of some comfort to his later hours. He appreciated all that warmth of sympathy, that delicacy of heart, which had made the old man compassionate his young relation’s unfriended lot, and couple his gift with a condition, likely, perhaps, to moderate Percy’s desires to the independence thus be-

stowed, and certain to remove his more tender years from a scene of the most constant contagion. Thus melancholy and thoughtful, Godolphin repaired to the house of the now famous, the now admired Miss Millinger.

Fanny received the good news of his fortune with a smile, and the bad news of his departure from England with a tear. There are some attachments, of which we so easily sound the depth, that the one never thinks of exacting from the other the sacrifices that seem inevitable to more earnest ties. Fanny never dreamed of leaving her theatrical career, and accompanying Godolphin; Godolphin never dreamed of demanding it. These are very pleasant *liaisons*, my good reader;—these are the connexions of the great world: learn the great world as you look at them!

All was soon settled. Godolphin was easily disembarassed of his commission. Six hundred

a-year from his fortune was allowed him during his minority. On this he might well play a decorous part, not indeed as the English Seigneur, but as the citizen of the world. At the age of little more than sixteen, but with a character which premature independence had half formed, and also half enervated, the young Godolphin saw the shores of England recede before him, and felt himself alone in the universe—the lord of his own fate.

CHAPTER X.

THE EDUCATION OF CONSTANCE'S MIND.

MEANWHILE, Constance Vernon grew up in womanhood and beauty. All around her contributed to feed that stern remembrance which her father's dying words had bequeathed. Naturally proud, quick, susceptible, she felt slights, often merely incidental, with a deep and brooding resentment. The forlorn and dependent girl could not, indeed, fail to meet with many bitter proofs that her situation was not forgotten by a world, in which prosperity and station are the cardinal virtues. Many a loud whisper, many an intentional "aside,"

reached her haughty ear, and coloured her pale cheek. Such accidents increased her early-formed asperity of thought; chilled the gushing flood of her young affections; and sharpened, with a relentless edge, her bitter and caustic hatred to an aristocracy she deemed at once insolent and worthless. To a taste intuitively fine and noble, the essential vulgarities;—the fierceness to-day; the cringing to-morrow; the veneration for power; the indifference to virtue, which characterised the framers and rulers of “society,”—could not but bring contempt as well as anger; and amidst the brilliant circles, to which so many aspirers looked up with hopeless ambition, Constance moved only to ridicule, to loathe, to despise.

So strong, so constantly nourished, was this sentiment of contempt, that it lasted with equal bitterness when Constance afterwards

became the queen and presider over that great world in which she now shone, to dazzle, but not to rule. What at first might have seemed an exaggerated and insane prayer on the part of her father, grew, as her experience ripened, a natural and laudable command. She resolved to humble the crested arrogance around her, as much from her own desire, as from the wish to obey and revenge her father. From this contempt for rank rose naturally the ambition of rank. The young beauty resolved to banish love from her heart; to devote herself to one aim and object; to win title and station, that she might be able to give power and permanence to her disdain of those qualities in others; and in the secrecy of night she repeated the vow which had consoled her father's death-bed, and solemnly resolved to crush love within her heart, and marry solely for station and for power.

As the daughter of so celebrated a politician, it was natural that Constance should take interest in politics. She lent to every discussion of state events an eager and thirsty ear. She embraced with masculine ardour such sentiments as were then considered the extreme of liberality; and she looked on that career which society limits to *man*, as the noblest, the loftiest in the world. She secretly cursed her lot that she was a woman, and prevented from personally carrying into effect the sentiments she passionately espoused. Meanwhile, she did not neglect, or suffer to rust, the bright weapon of a wit which embodied, at times, all the biting energies of her contempt. To insolence she retorted sarcasm; and, early able to see that society, like virtue, must be trampled upon in order to yield forth its incense, she rose into respect by the hauteur of her manner, the bluntness of her satire,

the independence of her mind, far more than by her various accomplishments and her unrivalled beauty.

Of Lady Erpingham she had nothing to complain ; kind, easy, *insouciant*e, and characterless, her protectress sometimes wounded her by carelessness, but never through design ; on the contrary, the Countess at once loved and admired her, and was as anxious that her *protégé* should form a brilliant alliance as if she had been her own daughter. Constance, therefore, loved Lady Erpingham with sincere and earnest warmth, and endeavoured to forget all the common-places and littlenesses of character which made up the mind of her protectress, and which, otherwise, would have been precisely of that nature to which one, like Constance, would have been the least indulgent.

CHAPTER XI.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN LADY ERPINGHAM AND CONSTANCE.—FARTHER PARTICULARS OF GODOLPHIN'S FAMILY, ETC.

LADY ERPINGHAM was a widow ; her jointure—for she had been an heiress and a duke's daughter—was large ; and the noblest mansion of all the various seats possessed by the wealthy and powerful house of Erpingham had been allotted by her late lord for her widowed residence. Thither she went punctually on the first of every August, and quitted it punctually on the eighth of every January.

It was some years after the date of Godolphin's departure from England, and the sum-

mer following the spring in which Constance had been “brought out:”—and after a *début* of such splendour that, at this day (many years subsequent to that period), the sensation she created is not only a matter of remembrance but of conversation, Constance—despite the triumph of her vanity—was not displeased to seek some refuge, even from admiration, among the shades of Wendover Castle.

“When,” said she one morning, as she was walking with Lady Erpingham upon a terrace beneath the windows of the castle, which overlooked the country for miles,—“when will you go with me, dear Lady Erpingham, to see those ruins, of which I have heard so much and so often, and which I have never been able to persuade you to visit? Look! the day is so clear that we can see their outline now—there, to the right of that church!—they cannot be so very far from Wendover.”

“Godolphin Priory is about twelve miles off,” said Lady Erpingham; “but it may seem nearer, for it is situated on the highest spot of the county. Poor Godolphin! he is lately dead!” Lady Erpingham sighed.

“I never heard you speak of him before.”

“There might be a reason for my silence, Constance. He was the person, of all whom I ever saw, who appeared to me, when I was your age, the most fascinating. Not, Constance, that I was in love with him, or that he gave me any reason to become so through gratitude for any affection on his part. It was a girl’s fancy, idle and short-lived—nothing more!”

“And the young Godolphin—the boy who, at so early an age, has made himself known for his eccentric life abroad?——”

“Is his son—the present owner of those ruins, and, I fear, of little more, unless it be the remains of a legacy received from a relation.”

“ Was the father extravagant, then ? ”

“ Not he ! But *his* father had exceeded a patrimony greatly involved, and greatly reduced from its ancient importance. All the lands we see yonder—those villages, those woods—once belonged to the Godolphins. They were the most ancient and the most powerful family in this part of England ; but the estates dwindled away with each successive generation, and when Arthur Godolphin—*my* Godolphin—succeeded to the property, nothing was left for him but the choice of three evils—a profession, obscurity, or a wealthy marriage. My father, who had long destined me for Lord Erpingham, insinuated that it was in me that Mr. Godolphin wished to find the resource I have last mentioned, and that in such resource was my only attraction in his eyes. I have some reason to believe he proposed to the Duke ; but he was silent to

me, from whom, girl as I was, he might have been less certain of refusal."

"What did he at last?"

"Married a lady who was supposed to be an heiress; but he had scarcely enjoyed her fortune a year before it became the subject of a lawsuit. He lost the cause and the dowry; and, what was worse, the expenses of litigation, and the sums he was obliged to refund reduced him to what, for a man of his rank, might be considered absolute poverty. He was thoroughly chagrined and soured by this event; retired to those ruins, or rather to the small cottage that adjoins them, and there lived to the day of his death, shunning society, and certainly not exceeding his income."

"I understand you: he became parsimonious."

"To the excess which his neighbours called miserly."

“ And his wife ?”

“ Poor woman ! she was a mere fine lady, and died, I believe, of the same vexation which nipped, not the life, but the heart of her husband.”

“ Had they only one son ?”

“ Only the present owner : Percy, I think—yes, Percy ; it was his mother’s surname—Percy Godolphin.”

“ And how came this poor boy to be thrown so early on the world ? Did he quarrel with Mr. Godolphin ?”

“ I believe not : but when Percy was about fifteen, he left the obscure school at which he was educated, and resided for some little time with a relation, Augustus Saville. He stayed with him in London for about a year, and went everywhere with him, though so mere a boy. His manners were, I well remember, assured and formed. A relation left him

some moderate legacy, and afterwards he went abroad alone."

"But the ruins! The late Mr. Godolphin, notwithstanding his reserve, did not object to indulging the curiosity of his neighbours?"

"No! he was proud of the interest the ruins of his hereditary mansion so generally excited; proud of their celebrity in print-shops and in tours; but he himself was never seen. The cottage in which he lived, though it adjoins the ruins, was, of course, sacred from intrusion, and is so walled-in that that great delight of English visitors at show-places—peeping-in at windows—was utterly forbidden. However that be, during Mr. Godolphin's life, I never had courage to visit what, to me, would have been a melancholy scene: now, the pain would be somewhat less; and since you wish it, suppose we drive over and visit the ruins to-morrow. It is the regular day for seeing them, by the by."

“Not, dear Lady Erpingham, if it give you the least——”

“My sweet girl,” interrupted Lady Erpingham, when a servant approached to announce visitors at the castle.

“Will you go into the saloon, Constance?” said the elder Lady, as, thinking still of love and Arthur Godolphin, she took her way to her dressing-room to renovate her rouge.

It would have been a pretty amusement to one of the lesser devils, if, during the early romance of Lady Erpingham’s feelings towards Arthur Godolphin, he had foretold her the hour when she would tell how Arthur Godolphin died a miser—just five minutes before she repaired to the toilette to decorate the cheek of age for the heedless eyes of a common acquaintance.—’Tis the world’s way! For my part, I would undertake to find a better world in that rookery opposite my windows.

CHAPTER XII.

DESCRIPTION OF GODOLPHIN'S HOUSE.—THE FIRST INTERVIEW,—ITS EFFECT ON CONSTANCE.

“BUT,” asked Constance, as, the next day, Lady Erpingham and herself were performing the appointed pilgrimage to the ruins of Godolphin Priory; “if the late Mr. Godolphin, as he grew in years, acquired a turn of mind so penurious, was he not enabled to leave his son some addition to the *pied de terre* we are about to visit?”

“He must certainly have left some ready money,” answered Lady Erpingham. “But is it, after all, likely that so young a man

as Percy Godolphin could have lived in the manner he has done without incurring debts? It is most probable that he had some recourse to those persons so willing to encourage the young and extravagant, and that repayment to them will more than swallow up any savings his father might have amassed."

"True enough!" said Constance; and the conversation glided into remarks on avaricious fathers and prodigal sons. Constance was witty on the subject, and Lady Erpingham laughed herself into excellent humour.

It was considerably past noon when they arrived at the ruins. The carriage stopped before a small inn, at the entrance of a dismantled park; and, taking advantage of the beauty of the day, Lady Erpingham and her *protégé* walked slowly toward the remains of the Priory.

The scene, as they approached, was wild

and picturesque in the extreme. A wide and glassy lake lay stretched beneath them: on the opposite side stood the ruins. The large oriel window; the Gothic arch; the broken, yet still majestic column, all embrowned and mossed with age, were still spared, and now mirrored themselves in the waveless and silent tide. Fragments of stone lay around, for some considerable distance, and the whole was backed by hills, covered with gloomy and thick woods of larch and fir. To the left, they saw the stream which fed the lake, stealing away through grassy banks, overgrown with the willow and pollard oak; and there, —from one or two cottages, only caught in glimpses—thin wreaths of smoke rose in spires against the clear sky. To the right, the ground was broken into a thousand glens and hollows: the deer-loved fern, the golden broom were scattered about profusely; and here and

there were dense groves of pollards; or, at very rare intervals, some single tree decaying, (for all round bore the seal of vassalage to time,) but mighty, and greenly venerable in its decay.

As they passed over a bridge that, on either side of the stream, emerged, as it were, from a thick copse, they caught a view of the small abode that adjoined the ruins. It seemed covered entirely with ivy; and, so far from diminishing, tended rather to increase, the romantic and imposing effect of the crumbling pile from which it grew.

They opened a little gate at the other extremity of the bridge, and in a few minutes more, they stood at the entrance to the Priory.

It was an oak door, studded with nails. The jessamine grew upon either side; and, to descend to a common-place matter, they

had some difficulty in finding the bell among the leaves in which it was embedded. When they had found and touched it, its clear and lively sound rang out in that still and lovely, though desolate spot, with an effect startling and impressive from its contrast. There is something very fairy-like in the cheerful voice of a bell sounding among the wilder scenes of nature, particularly where time advances his claim to the sovereignty of the landscape; for the cheerfulness is a little ghostly, and might serve well enough for a tocsin to the elvish hordes whom our footsteps may be supposed to disturb.

An old woman, in the neat peasant dress of our country, when, taking a little from the fashion of the last century, (the cap and the kerchief,) it assumes the semblance of no ungraceful costume, — replied to their summons. She was the solitary cicerone of the

place. She had lived there, a lone and childless widow, for thirty years; and, of all the persons I have ever seen, would furnish forth the best heroine to one of those divine pictures of homely (yet how intellectual!) life which Wordsworth has dignified with the patriarchal tenderness of his genius.

They wound a narrow passage, and came to the ruins of the great hall. Its Gothic arches still sprang lightly upward on either side; and, opening a large stone box that stood in a recess, the old woman showed them the gloves, and the helmet, and the tattered banners, which had belonged to that Godolphin who had fought side by side with Sidney when he, whose life—as the noblest of British lyrists hath somewhere said—was “poetry put into action,”* received his death-wound in the field of Zutphen.

* Campbell.

From thence they ascended, by the dilapidated and crumbling staircase, to a small room, in which the visitors were always expected to rest themselves, and enjoy the scene in the garden below. A large chasm yawned where the casement once was; and round this aperture the ivy wreathed itself in fantastic luxuriance. A sort of ladder, suspended from this chasm to the ground, afforded a convenience for those who were tempted to a short excursion by the view without.

And the view *was* tempting! A smooth green lawn, surrounded by shrubs and flowers, was ornamented in the centre by a fountain. The waters were, it is true, dried up; but the basin, and the "Triton with his wreathed shell," still remained. A little to the right was an old monkish sun-dial; and through the green vista you caught the glimpse of one of those grey grotesque statues with which the

taste of Elizabeth's day shamed the classic chisel.

There was something quiet and venerable about the whole place; and when the old woman said to Constance, "Would not you like, my lady, to walk down and look at the sundial and the fountain?" Constance felt she required nothing more to yield to her inclination. Lady Erpingham, less adventurous, remained in the ruined chamber; and the old woman, naturally enough, honoured the elder lady with her company.

Constance, therefore, descended the rude steps alone. As she paused by the fountain, an indescribable and delicious feeling of repose stole over a mind that seldom experienced any sentiment so natural or so soft. The hour, the stillness, the scene, all conspired to lull the heart into that dreaming and half-unconscious reverie in which poets would suppose the her-

mits of elder times to have wasted a life, indolent, and yet scarcely, after all, unwise. "Methinks," she inly soliloquised, "while I look around, I feel as if I could give up my objects of life; renounce my hopes; forget to be artificial and ambitious; live in these ruins, and," (whispered the spirit within) "loved and loving, fulfil the ordinary doom of woman."

Indulging a mood, the proud and restless Constance, who despised love as the poorest of human weaknesses, though easily susceptible to all other species of romance, had scarcely ever even known before, she wandered away from the lawn into one of the alleys cut amidst the grove around. Caught by the murmur of an unseen brook, she tracked it through the trees, as its sound grew louder and louder on her ear, till at length it stole upon her sight. The sun, only winning through the trees at intervals, played capriciously upon its cold

and dark waters as they glided on, and gave to her, as the same effect has done to a thousand poets, ample matter for a simile or a moral.

She approached the brook, and came un-awares upon the figure of a young man, leaning against a stunted tree that overhung the waters, and occupied with the idle amusement of dropping pebbles in the stream. She saw only his profile; but that view is, in a fine countenance, almost always the most striking and impressive, and it was eminently so in the face before her. The stranger, who was scarcely removed from boyhood, was dressed in deep mourning. He seemed slight, and small of stature. A travelling cap of sables contrasted, not hid, light auburn hair of singular richness and beauty. His features were of that pure and severe Greek of which the only fault is, that, in the very perfection of the chiselling of the features, there seems some-

thing hard and stern. The complexion was pale, even to wanness; and the whole cast and contour of the head were full of intellect, and betokening that absorption of mind which cannot be marked in any one without exciting a certain vague curiosity and interest.

So dark and wondrous are the workings of our nature, that there are scarcely any of us, however light and unthinking, who would not be arrested by the countenance of one in deep reflection—who would not pause, and long to pierce into the mysteries that were agitating that world, most illimitable by nature, but often most narrowed by custom—the world within.

And this interest, powerful as it is, spelled and arrested Constance at once. She remained for a minute gazing on the countenance of the young stranger, and then she—the most self-possessed and stately of human creatures—

blushing deeply, and confused though unseen, turned lightly away, and stopped not on her road till she regained the old chamber and Lady Erpingham.

The old woman was descanting upon the merits of the late lord of Godolphin Priory:—
“For though they called him close, and so forth, my lady, yet he was generous to others; it was only himself he pinched. But, to be sure, the present squire won't take after him there.”

“Has Mr. Percy Godolphin been here lately?” asked Lady Erpingham.

“He is at the cottage now, my lady,” replied the old woman. “He came two days ago.”

“Is he like his father?”

“Oh! not near so fine-looking a gentleman! much smaller, and quite pale-like. He seems sickly: them foreign parts do nobody no good.”

He was as fine a lad at fifteen years old as ever I seed ; but now he is not like the same thing."

So then, it was evidently Percy Godolphin whom Constance had seen by the brook—the owner of a home without coffers and estates without a rent-roll—the Percy Godolphin of whom, before he had yet attained the age when others have left the college, or even the school, every one had learned to speak—some favourably, all with eagerness. Constance felt a vague interest respecting him spring up in her mind : she checked it, for it was a sin in her eyes to think with interest on a man neither rich nor powerful ; and as she quitted the ruins with Lady Erpingham, she communicated to the latter her adventure. She was, however, disingenuous ; for though Godolphin's beauty was exactly of that cast which Constance most admired, she described him just as the old woman had done ; and Lady Erpingham

figured to herself, from the description, a little yellow man, with white hair and a turned-up nose. Oh Truth! what a hard path is thine! Does any keep it for three inches together in the commonest trifle?—and yet two sides of my library are filled with histories!

CHAPTER XIII.

A BALL ANNOUNCED.—GODOLPHIN'S VISIT TO WEN-
DOVER CASTLE.—HIS MANNERS AND CONVERSATION.

LADY ERPINGHAM (besides her daughter, Lady Eleanor, married to Mr. Clare, a county Member, of large fortune,) was blessed with one son.

The present Earl had been for the last two years abroad. He had never, since his accession to his title, visited Wendover Castle; and Lady Erpingham one morning experienced the delight of receiving a letter from him, dated Dover, and signifying his intention of paying her a visit. In honour of this event,

Lady Erpingham resolved to give a grand ball. Cards were issued to all the families in the county; and, among others, to Mr. Godolphin.

On the third day after this invitation had been sent to the person I have last named, as Lady Erpingham and Constance were alone in the saloon, Mr. Percy Godolphin was announced. Constance blushed as she looked up, and Lady Erpingham was struck by the nobleness of his address, and the perfect self-possession of his manner. And yet nothing could be so different as was his deportment from that which she had been accustomed to admire—from that manifested by the exquisites of the day. The calm, the nonchalance, the artificial smile of languor, the evenness, so insipid, yet so irreproachable, of English manners when considered most polished; all this was the reverse of Godolphin's address and

air. In short, in all he said or did, there was something foreign, something unfamiliar. He was abrupt and enthusiastic in conversation, and used gestures in speaking. His countenance lighted up at every word that broke from him on the graver subjects of discussion. You felt, indeed, with him, that you were with a man of genius—a wayward and a spoiled man, who had acquired his habits in solitude, though his graces in the world.

They conversed about the ruins of the Priory, and Constance expressed her admiration of their romantic and picturesque beauty. “Ah!” said he, smiling, but with a slight blush, in which Constance detected something of pain; “I heard of your visit to my poor heaps of stone. My father took great pleasure in the notice they attracted. When a proud man has not riches to be proud of, he grows proud of the signs of his poverty itself. This

was the case with my poor father. Had he been rich, the ruins would not have existed: he would have rebuilt the old mansion. As he was poor, he valued himself on their existence, and fancied magnificence in every handfull of moss. But all life is delusion: all pride, all vanity, all pomp, are equally deceit. Like the Spanish hidalgo, we put on spectacles when we eat our cherries, in order that they may seem ten times as big as they are!"

Constance smiled; and Lady Erpingham, who had more kindness than delicacy, continued her praises of the Priory and the scenery round it.

"The old park," said she, "with its wood and water, is so beautiful! It wants nothing but a few deer, just tame enough to come near the ruins, and wild enough to start away as you approach."

"Now you would borrow an attraction from

wealth," said Godolphin, who, unlike English persons in general, seemed to love alluding to his poverty: "it is not for the owner of a ruined Priory to consult the aristocratic enhancements of that costly luxury, the picturesque. Alas! I have not even wherewithal to feed a few solitary partridges; and I hear, that if I go beyond the green turf once a park, I shall be warned off forthwith, and my very qualification disputed."

"Are you fond of shooting?" said Lady Erpinham.

"I fancy I should be; but I have never enjoyed the sport in England."

"Do pray come, then," said Lady Erpingham, kindly, "and spend your first week in September here. Let me see: the first of the month will be next Thursday; dine with us on Wednesday. We have keepers and dogs here enough, thanks to Robert; so you need only bring your gun."

“ You are very kind, dear Lady Erpingham,” said Godolphin, warmly ; “ I accept your invitation at once.”

“ Your father was a very old friend of mine,” said the lady, with a sigh.

“ He was an old admirer,” said the gentleman, with a bow.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN GODOLPHIN AND CONSTANCE,
—THE COUNTRY LIFE AND THE TOWN LIFE.

AND Godolphin came on the appointed Wednesday. He was animated that day, even to brilliancy. Lady Erpingham thought him the most charming of men; and even Constance forgot that he was no match for herself. Gifted and cultivated as she was, it was not without delight that she listened to his glowing descriptions of scenery, and to his playful, yet somewhat melancholy strain of irony upon men and their pursuits. The peculiar features of her mind made her, indeed, like the latter more than she could appreciate

the former ; for in her nature there was more bitterness than romance. Still, his rich language and fluent periods, even in description, touched her ear and fancy, though they sank not to her heart ; and she yielded insensibly to the spells she would almost have despised in another.

The next day, Constance, who was no very early riser, tempted by the beauty of the noon, strolled into the gardens. She was surprised to hear Godolphin's voice behind her : she turned round, and he joined her.

“ I thought you were on your shooting expedition.”

“ I *have* been shooting, and I am returned. I was out by daybreak, and I came back at noon in the hope of being allowed to join you in your ride or walk.”

Constance smilingly acknowledged the compliment ; and as they passed up the straight

walks of the old-fashioned and stately gardens, Godolphin turned the conversation upon the varieties of garden scenery; upon the poets who had described these varieties best; upon that difference between the town life and the country, on which the brothers of the minstrel craft have, in all ages, so glowingly insisted. In this conversation, certain points of contrast between the characters of these two young persons might be observed.

“ I confess to you,” said Godolphin, “ that I have little faith in the permanence of any attachment professed for the country by the inhabitants of cities. If we can occupy our minds solely with the objects around us; if the brook, and the old tree, and the golden sunset, and the summer night, and the animal and homely life that we survey; if these can fill our contemplation, and take away from us the feverish schemes of the future,—*then*,

indeed, I can fully understand the reality of that tranquil and happy state which our elder poets have described as incident to a country life. But if we carry with us to the shade all the restless and perturbed desires of the city; if we only employ present leisure in schemes for an agitated future—then it is in vain that we affect the hermit, and fly to the retreat. The moment the novelty of green fields is over, and our projects are formed, we wish to hurry to the city to execute them. We have, in a word, made our retirement only a nursery for schemes now springing up, and requiring to be transplanted.”

“ You are right,” said Constance quickly; “ and who would pass life as if it were a dream? It seems to me that we put retirement to the right use when we make it only subservient to our aims in the world.”

“ A strange doctrine for a young beauty,”

thought Godolphin, "whose head ought to be full of groves and love." "Then," said he aloud, "I must rank among those who abuse the purposes of retirement; for I have hitherto been flattered to think that I enjoy it for itself. Despite the artificial life I have led, every thing that speaks of nature has a voice that I can rarely resist. What feelings created in a city can compare with those that rise so gently and so unbidden within us when the trees and the waters are our only companions—our only sources of excitement and intoxication? Is not contemplation better than ambition?"

"Can you believe it?" said Constance, incredulously.

"I do."

Constance smiled; and there would have been contempt in that beautiful smile, had not Godolphin interested her in spite of herself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FEELINGS OF CONSTANCE AND GODOLPHIN TOWARDS EACH OTHER.—THE DISTINCTION IN THEIR CHARACTERS.—REMARKS ON THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THE WORLD UPON GODOLPHIN.—THE RIDE.—RURAL DESCRIPTIONS.—OMENS.—THE FIRST INDISTINCT CONFESSION.

EVERY day, at the hour in which Constance was visible, Godolphin had loaded the keeper, and had returned to attend upon her movements. They walked and rode together; and in the evening, Godolphin hung over her chair, and listened to her songs; for, though she had but little science in instrumental music, her voice was rich and soft beyond the pathos of ordinary singers.

Lady Erpingham saw what she believed a growing attachment with secret delight. She loved Constance for herself, and Godolphin for his father's memory. She thought again and again what a charming couple they would make;—so handsome—so gifted: and if Prudence whispered also—so poor—the kind Countess remembered, that she herself had saved from her ample jointure, a sum which she had always designed as a dowry for Constance, and which, should Godolphin be the bridegroom, she felt she should have a tenfold pleasure in bestowing. With this fortune, which would place them, at least, in independence, she united the importance which she imagined Godolphin's talents must ultimately acquire, and for which, in her aristocratic estimation, she conceived the senate the only legitimate sphere. She said, she hinted, nothing to Constance; but she suffered nature, youth, and companionship to exercise their sway.

And the complexion of Godolphin's feelings for Constance Vernon did indeed resemble love —was love itself, though rather love in its romance than its reality. What were those of Constance for him? She knew not herself at that time. Had she been of a character one shade less ambitious, or less powerful, they would have been love, and love of no common character. But within her musing, and self-possessed, and singularly constituted mind, there was, as yet, a limit to every sentiment, a chain to the wings of every thought, save those of one order, and that order was not of love. There was a marked difference, in all respects, between the characters of the two; and it was singular enough, that the woman was the less romantic, and composed of the simpler materials.

A volume of Wordsworth's most exquisite poetry had then just appeared. "Is not this wonderful?" said Godolphin, reciting some of

those lofty, but refining and subtle thoughts which characterise the most pastoral, yet intellectual of all poets.

Constance shook her head.

“What! you do not admire it?”

“I do not understand it.”

“What poetry do you admire?”

“This.”

It was Pope’s translation of the “Iliad.”

“Yes, yes, to be sure,” said Godolphin, a little vexed; “we all admire this: but what else?”

Constance pointed to a passage in the “Palamon and Arcite” of Dryden.

Godolphin threw down his Wordsworth.—
“You take an ungenerous advantage of me,” said he. “Tell me something you admire, which, at least, I may have the privilege of disputing—something that you think generally neglected.”

“ I admire few things that are generally neglected,” answered Constance, with her bright and arch smile; “ Fame gives its stamp to all metal that is of intrinsic value.”

This answer was quite characteristic of Constance: she worshipped fame far more than the genius which won it.

“ Well, then,” said Godolphin, “ let us see *now* if we can come to a compromise of sentiment;” and he took up the “ Comus ” of Milton.

No one read poetry so beautifully: his voice was so deep and flexible; and his countenance answered so well to every modulation of his voice. Constance was touched by the reader, but not by the verse. Godolphin had great penetration; he perceived it, and turned to the speeches of Satan in “ Paradise Lost.” The noble countenance before him grew luminous at once: the lip quivered, the eye sparkled;

the enthusiasm of Godolphin was not comparable to that of Constance. The fact was, that the broad and common emotions of the intellectual character struck upon the right key. Courage, defiance, ambition, these she comprehended to their fullest extent ; but the rich subtleties of thought which mark the cold and bright page of the “*Comus* ;” the noble Platonism—the high and rare love for what is abstractedly good—these were not “*sonorous and trumpet-speaking*” enough for the heart of one meant by Nature for a heroine or a queen, not a poetess or a philosopher.

But all that in literature was delicate, and half-seen, and abstruse, had its peculiar charm for Godolphin. Of a reflective and refining mind, he had early learned to despise the common emotions of men: glory touched him not, and to ambition he had shut his heart. Love, with him—even though he had been

deemed, nor unjustly, a profligate and a man of pleasure—love was not compounded of the ordinary elements of the passions. Full of dreams, and refinements, and intense abstractions, it was a love that seemed not homely enough for endurance, and of too rare a nature to hope for sympathy in return.

And so it was in his intercourse with Constance; both were continually disappointed. “You do not feel this,” said Constance.—“She cannot understand me,” sighed Godolphin.

But we must not suppose—despite his refinements, and his reveries, and his love for the intellectual and the pure—that Godolphin was of a stainless character or mind. He was one who, naturally full of decided and marked qualities, was, by the peculiar elements of our society, rendered a doubtful, motley, and indistinct character, tintured by

the frailties that leave us in a wavering state between vice and virtue. The energies that had marked his boyhood were dulled and crippled beneath the indolent life of the world. His wandering habits for the last few years—the soft and poetical existence of the South—had fed his natural romance, and nourished that passion for contemplation which the intellectual man of pleasure so commonly forms; for pleasure has a philosophy of its own—a sad, a fanciful, yet deep persuasion of the vanity of all things—a craving after the bright ideal—

“ The desire of the moth for the star.”

Solomon's thirst for pleasure was the companion of his wisdom: satiety was the offspring of the one—discontent of the other. But this philosophy, though seductive, is of no wholesome or useful character: it is the philosophy of feelings, not principles—of the heart, not

head. So with Godolphin: he was too refined in his moralizing to cling to what was moral. The simply good and the simply bad he left for us plain folks to discover. He was unattracted by the doctrines of Socrates or Bentham, because they will serve for all men; but he had some obscure and shadowy standard in his own mind by which he compared the actions of others. He had imagination, genius, even heart; was brilliant always, sometimes profound; graceful in society, yet seldom social; a lonely man, yet a man of the world; a dreamer, yet a *roué*; generous to individuals, selfish to the mass. How many fine qualities worse than thrown away!

Who will not allow that he has met many such men?—and who will not follow this man to his end?

One day (it was the last of Godolphin's protracted visit), as the sun was waning to its

close, and the time was unusually soft and tranquil, Constance and Godolphin were returning slowly home from their customary ride. They passed by a small inn, bearing the common sign of the "Chequers," round which a crowd of peasants were assembled, listening to the rude music a wandering Italian boy drew from his guitar. The scene was rustic and picturesque; and as Godolphin reined in his horse and gazed on the group, he little dreamed of the fierce and dark emotions with which, at a far distant period, he was destined to revisit that spot.

"Our peasants," said he, as they rode on, "require some humanizing relaxation like that we have witnessed. The music and the morrice-dance have gone from England; and instead of providing, as formerly, for the amusement of the grinded labourer, our aristocracy now regard with the most watchful jealousy his

most distant approach to festivity. They cannot bear the rustic to be merry: disorder and amusement are words for the same offence. From their own gambling circles, their licentious chamberings, their heated banquets, they send forth declamations against the debaucheries of the poor; and even an extra glass of beer and a newspaper are full of democratic licentiousness in their eyes."

"Oh, that aristocracy!" said Constance, bitterly; "so mean, so sordid, so insolent!—the day must come when we shall see it morally trampled down. It has lived without dignity; it will fall without valour. At present, how startlingly hollow is its real power! It has no vassals—no armed force. To-day, opinion supports it:—if to-morrow opinion veer round, to-morrow it is weaker than an infant. It is the puppet—the weathercock of every accident!"

“You are right,” said Godolphin; “but your sentiments surprise me. Is this from the courtly and courted Miss Vernon?”

“Believe me,” said Constance, with quickness, “it is amongst the aristocracy themselves that their bitterest contemners are found. Those who suffer under the system every day, are more likely to loathe it than the mass, who seldom palpably come in contact with it. Its constant meanness is more sickening than its occasional violence.”

Godolphin smiled. “You take the course of the world less smoothly than I do,” said he. “I perceive that small things fret you; I laugh at them. I can be offended, but not galled. No man has it in his power to mortify me. You have scorn for fools; I, only indifference. You waste too much feeling upon stones and straws.”

Thus talking, they passed a shallow ford

in the stream. "We are not far from the Priory," said Godolphin, pointing to its ruins, that rose greyly in the evening skies from the green woods around it.

Constance sighed involuntarily. She felt pain in being reminded of the slender fortunes of her companion. Ascending the gentle hill that swelled from the stream, she now, to turn the current of her thoughts, pointed admiringly to the blue course of the waters, as they wound through their shagged banks. And deep, dark, rushing, even in that still hour, went the stream through the boughs that swept over its surface. Here and there the banks suddenly shelved down, mingling with the waves; then abruptly they rose, overspread with thick and tangled umbrage, several feet above the level of the river.

"How strange it is," said Godolphin, "that at times a feeling comes over, as we gaze upon

certain places, which associates the scene either with some dim-remembered and dream-like images of the Past, or with a prophetic and fearful omen of the Future. As I gaze now upon that spot—those banks—that whirling river—it seems as if my destiny claimed a mysterious sympathy with the scene: when—how—wherefore—I know not—guess not: only this shadowy and chilling sentiment unaccountably creeps over me. Every one has known a similar strange, indistinct feeling at certain times and places, and with a similar inability to trace the cause. And yet, is it not singular that, in poetry, which wears most feelings to an echo, I have never met with any attempt to describe it?”

“Because poetry,” said Constance, “is, after all, but a hackneyed imitation of the most common thoughts, giving them merely a gloss by the music of verse. And yet how little poets

know! They *imagine*, and they *imitate*:—
behold all their secrets!”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Godolphin, musingly; “and I, who have often vainly fancied I had the poetical temperament, have been so chilled and sickened by the characteristics of the tribe, that I have checked its impulses with a sort of disdain; and thus the Ideal, having no vent in me, preys within, creating a thousand undefined dreams and unwilling superstitions, making me enamoured of the shadowy and unknown, and dissatisfying me with the petty ambitions of the world.”

“You will awake hereafter,” said Constance, earnestly.

Godolphin shook his head, and replied not.

Their way now lay along a green lane that gradually wound around a hill commanding a view of great richness and beauty. Cottages, and spires, and groves gave life—but it was

a scattered and remote life—to the scene ; and the broad stream, whose waves, softened in the distance, did not seem to break the even surface of the tide, flowed onward, glowing in the sun-light, till it was lost among dark and luxuriant woods.

Both once more arrested their horses by a common impulse, and both became suddenly silent as they gazed. Godolphin was the first to speak : it brought to his memory a scene in that delicious land, whose Southern loveliness Claude has breathed upon the canvass, and De Stael into the page. With his own impassioned and earnest language, he spoke to Constance of that scene and that country. Every tree before him furnished matter for his illustration or his contrast ; and Constance, as she heard that magic voice, and speaking, too, of a country dedicated to love—Constance listened with glistening eyes, and a cheek

which he—consummate master of the secrets of womanhood—perceived was eloquent with thoughts which *she* knew not, but which *he* interpreted to the letter.

“And in such a spot,” said he, continuing, and fixing his deep and animated gaze on her; “in such a spot I could have stayed for ever, but for one recollection, one feeling—I *should have been too much alone*. In a wild, or a grand, or even a barren country, we may live in solitude, and find fit food for thought; but not in one so soft, so subduing, as that which I saw and see. Love comes over us then, in spite of ourselves; and I feel—I feel now—” his voice trembled as he spoke—“that any secret we may before have nursed, though hitherto unacknowledged, makes itself at length a voice. We are oppressed with the desire to be loved; we long for the courage to say we love.”

Never before had Godolphin, though constantly verging into sentiment, spoken to Constance in so plain a language. Eye, voice, cheek — *all* spoke. She felt that he had confessed he loved her! And was she not happy at that thought? She was: it was her happiest moment. But, in that sort of vague and indistinct shrinking from the subject with which a woman who loves hears a disclosure of love from him on whose lips it is most sweet, she muttered some confused attempt to change the subject, and quickened her horse's pace. Godolphin did not attempt to renew the topic so interesting and so dangerous; only, as, with the winding of the road, the landscape gradually faded from their view, he said, in a low voice, and as if to himself:—
“How long, how fondly, shall I remember this day!”

CHAPTER XVI.

GODOLPHIN'S RETURN HOME.—HIS SOLILOQUY.—LORD
ERPINGHAM'S ARRIVAL AT WENDOVER CASTLE.—THE
EARL DESCRIBED.—HIS ACCOUNT OF GODOLPHIN'S
LIFE AT ROME.

WITH a listless step, Godolphin re-entered the threshold of his cottage-home. He passed into a small chamber, which was yet the largest in his house. The poor and scanty furniture scattered around; the old, tuneless, broken harpsichord; the worn and tattered carpet; the tenantless birdcage in the recess by the window; the book-shelves, containing some dozen of worthless volumes; the sofa of the

last century—(when, if people knew comfort, they placed it not in lounging)—small, narrow, high-backed, hard, and knotted;—these—just as his father had left, just as his boyhood had seen them,—greeted him with a comfortless and chill, though familiar welcome. It was evening: he ordered a fire and lights; and, leaning his face on his hand as he contemplated the fitful and dusky upbreakings of the flame through the bars of the niggard and contracted grate, he sat himself down to hold commune with his heart.

“ So, I love this woman,” said he, “ do I ? —Have I not deceived myself ? She is poor—no connexion; she has nothing whereby to reinstate my house’s fortunes—to rebuild this mansion, or repurchase yonder demesnes. I love her ! *I*, who have known the value of her sex so well, that I have said, again and again, I would not shackle life with a princess ! Love

may withstand possession—true—but not time. In three years, there would be no glory in the face of Constance ; and I should be—what?— My fortunes, broken as they are, can support *me*—alone, and with my few wants. But if married ! the haughty Constance my wife !— Nay, nay, nay ! this must not be thought of ! I, the hero of Paris ! the lover of La — ! the pupil of Saville ! I, to be so beguiled as even to *dream* of such a madness !

“ Yet I have that within me that might make a stir in the world—I might rise. Professions are open : the Diplomacy—the House of Commons. What ! Percy Godolphin be ass enough to grow ambitious ! to toil, to fret, to slave, to answer fools on a first principle, and die at length of a broken heart or a lost place ! Pooh, pooh ! I, who despise your prime-ministers, can scarcely stoop to their apprenticeship. Life is too short for toil. And what

do men strive for?—to enjoy: but why not enjoy without the toil?—And relinquish Constance?—Ay, it is but one woman lost!”

So ended the soliloquy of a man scarcely of age. The world teaches us its last lessons betimes; but then, lest we should have nothing left to acquire from its wisdom, it employs the rest of our life in unlearning all that it first taught.

Meanwhile, the time approached when Lord Erpingham was to arrive at Wendover Castle; and at length came the day itself. Naturally anxious to enjoy as exclusively as possible the company of her son, the first day of his return from so long an absence, Lady Erpingham had asked no one to meet him. The Earl's heavy travelling-carriage at length rolled clattering up the court-yard; and in a few minutes, a tall man in the prime of life, and borrowing some favourable effect, as to person,

from the large cloak of velvet and furs which hung round him, entered the room, and Lady Erpingham embraced her son. The kind and familiar manner with which he answered her inquiries and congratulations was somewhat changed when he suddenly perceived Constance. Lord Erpingham was a cold man, and, like most cold men, ashamed of the evidence of affection. He greeted Constance very quietly and, as she thought, slightly: but his eyes turned to her far more often than any friend of Lord Erpingham's might ever have remarked those large, round, hazel eyes turn to any one before.

When the Earl withdrew to adjust his toilet for dinner, Lady Erpingham, as she wiped her eyes, could not help exclaiming to Constance—
“Is he not handsome?—What a figure!”

Constance was a little addicted to flattery, where she liked the one to be flattered, and

she assented readily enough to the maternal remark. Hitherto, however, she had not observed anything more in Lord Erpingham than his height and his cloak: as he re-entered and led her to the dining-room, she took a better, though still but a casual survey.

Lord Erpingham was of that description of person of which *men* always say, “What a prodigiously-fine fellow!” He was above six feet high—stout in proportion: not, indeed, accurately formed, nor graceful in bearing, but quite as much so as a man of six feet high need be. He had a manly complexion of brown, yellow, and red. His whiskers were exceedingly large, black, and well arranged. His eyes, as I have before said, were round, large, and hazel; they were also unmeaning. His teeth were good; and his nose, neither aquiline nor Grecian, was yet a very showy nose upon the whole. All the maid-servants

admired him ; and you felt, in looking at him, that it was a pity to lose so good a grenadier.

Lord Erpingham was a Whig of the old school : he disliked free-trade, but he thought the Tory boroughs ought to be thrown open. He was generally considered a sensible man. He had read Blackstone, Montesquieu, Cowper's poems, and "The Rambler;" and he was always heard with great attention in the House of Lords. In his moral character, he was a *bon-vivant* as far as wine is concerned—for choice *eating* he cared nothing. He was good-natured, but close ; brave enough to fight a duel, if necessary, and religious enough to go to church once a-week—in the country.

So far, Lord Erpingham might seem modelled from one of Sir Walter's heroes : we must reverse the medal, and show the points in which he differed from those patterns of propriety.

Like the generality of Whig noolemen, he was peculiarly loose in his notions of women, though not ardent in pursuit of them. His amours had been among opera-dancers, "Because," as he was wont to say, "there was no d——d bore with *them*;" though he had seen too much of his own world not to know that great ladies seldom value themselves on too fastidious a prudery; nor was his honour of that description which would particularly resent the fallen virtue either of a sister, or, had he been married, of a wife. Nevertheless, he was always considered a high-minded man. People chose him as an umpire in quarrels; and told a story (that was not true) of his having held some state office for a whole year, and insisted on returning the emoluments!

Such was Robert Lord Erpingham. During dinner—at which he displayed, to his mother's great delight, a most excellent appetite—he

listened, as well as he might, considering the more legitimate occupation of the time and season, to Lady Erpingham's recitals of county history; her long answers to his brief inquiries whether old friends were dead and young ones married; and brightened up to an expression of interest when he was told that birds were said to be plentiful.

As the servants left the room, and Lord Erpingham took his first glass of claret, the conversation fell upon Percy Godolphin.

"He has been staying with us a whole fortnight," said Lady Erpingham; "And, by the by, he said he had met you in Italy, and mentioned your name as it deserved."

"Indeed! And did he really condescend to praise me?" said Lord Erpingham with eagerness; for there was that about Godolphin, and his reputation for fastidiousness, which gave a rarity and a value to his praise, at least to

lordly ears. "Ah! he's a queer fellow: he led a very singular life in Italy."

"So I have always heard," said Lady Erpingham. "But of what description?—was he very wild?"

"No, not exactly: there was a good deal of mystery about him: he saw very few English, and those only men who played high. He was said to have a great deal of learning, and so forth."

"Oh! then he was surrounded, I suppose, by those medallists, and picture-sellers, and other impostors, who live upon such of our countrymen as think themselves blessed with a taste or afflicted with a genius," said Lady Erpingham; who having lived with the wits and orators of the time, had caught mechanically their way of rounding a period.

"Far from it!" returned the Earl: "Godolphin is much too deep a fellow for that:

he's not easily taken in, I assure you. I confess, I don't like him the worse for that," added the close noble. "But he lived with the Italian doctors and men of science; and encouraged, in particular, one strange fellow, who affected sorcery, I fancy, or something very like it. Godolphin resided in a very lonely spot at Rome; and I believe laboratories, and caldrons, and all sorts of devilish things, were always at work there—at least so people said."

"And yet," said Constance, "you thought him too sensible to be easily taken in."

"Indeed I do, Miss Vernon; and the proof of it is, that no man has less fortune or is more made of. He plays, it is true, but only occasionally—though as a player at games of skill he has no equal, unless it be Saville. But then, Saville, *entre nous*, is more than suspected of playing unfairly."

"And you are quite sure," said the placid

Lady Erpingham, “that Mr. Godolphin is only indebted to skill for his success?”

Constance darted a glance of fire at the speaker.

“Why, faith, I believe so! No one ever accused him of a single shabby, or even suspicious trick: and indeed, as I said before, no one was ever more sought after in society, though he shuns it; and he’s devilish right, for it’s a cursed bore!”

“My dear Robert! at your age!” said the mother.

“But,” continued the Earl, turning to Constance—“but, Miss Vernon, a man may have his weak point, and the cunning Italian may have hit on Godolphin’s, clever as he is in general; though, for my part, I will tell you frankly, I think he only encouraged him to mystify and perplex people, just to get talked of—vanity, in short. He’s a good-looking

fellow, that Godolphin — eh?” continued the Earl, in the tone of a man who meant you to deny what he asserted.

“ Oh, beautiful !” said Lady Erpingham :—
“ Such a countenance !”

“ Deuced pale, though !—eh?—and not the best of figures: thin, narrow-shouldered, eh—eh?”

Godolphin’s proportions were faultless; but your strapping heroes think of a moderate-sized man as mathematicians define a point—declare that he has no length or breadth whatsoever.

“ What say *you*, Constance?” asked Lady Erpingham meaningly.

Constance felt the meaning, and replied calmly, that Mr. Godolphin appeared to her handsomer than any one she had seen lately.

Lord Erpingham played with his neckcloth, and Lady Erpingham rose to leave the room.

“D——d fine girl!” said Erpingham, as he shut the door upon Constance;—“but d——d sharp!” added he, as he resettled himself on his chair.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONSTANCE AT HER TOILET.—HER FEELINGS.—HER ORDER OF BEAUTY DESCRIBED.—THE BALL.—THE DUCHESS OF WINSTOUN AND HER DAUGHTER.—AN INDUCTION FROM THE NATURE OF FEMALE RIVALRIES.—JEALOUSY IN A LOVER.—ARISTOCRATIC IMPERTINENCE RETORTED.—LISTENERS NEVER HEAR GOOD OF THEMSELVES.—REMARKS ON THE AMUSEMENTS OF A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY.—THE SUPPER.—THE FALSENESS OF SEEMING GAIETY.—VARIOUS REFLECTIONS, NEW AND TRUE.—WHAT PASSES BETWEEN GODOLPHIN AND CONSTANCE.

IT was the evening of the ball to be given in honour of Lord Erpingham's arrival. Constance, dressed for conquest, sat alone in her dressing-room. Her woman had just left her. The lights still burned in profusion about the

antique chamber ; (antique, for it was situated in the oldest part of the castle ;) those lights streamed full upon the broad brow and exquisite features of Miss Vernon. As she leaned back in her chair—the fairy foot upon the low Gothic stool, and the hands drooping beside her despondingly—her countenance betrayed much, but not serene, thought ; and, mixed with that thought, was something of irresolution and of great and real sadness.

It is not, as I have before hinted, to be supposed that Constance's lot had been hitherto a proud one, even though she was the most admired beauty of her day ; even though she lived with, and received adulation from, the high, and noble, and haughty of her land. Often, in the glittering crowd that she attracted around her, her ear, sharpened by the jealousy and pride of her nature, caught words that dashed the cup of pleasure and of vanity with

shame and anger.—“What! that *the* Vernon’s daughter? Poor girl! dependent entirely on Lady Erpingham. Ah! she’ll take in some rich *roturier*, I hope.”

Such words, from ill-tempered dowagers and faded beauties, were no unfrequent interruption to her brief-lived and wearisome triumphs. She heard manœuvring mothers caution their booby sons, whom Constance would have looked into the dust had they dared but to touch her hand, against her untitled and undowried charms. She saw cautious Earls, who were all courtesy one night, all coldness another, as some report had reached them, accusing their hearts of feeling too deeply her attractions, or as they themselves suspected, for the first time, that a heart was not a word for a poetical nothing, and that to look on so beautiful and glorious a creature was sufficient to convince them, even yet, of the possibility

of emotion. She had felt to the quick the condescending patronage of Duchesses and *chaperons*; the oblique hint; the nice and fine distinction which, in polished circles, divides each grade from the other, and allows you to be galled without the pleasure of feeling justified in offence.

All this, which, in the flush and heyday of youth, and gaiety, and loveliness, would have been unnoticed by other women, rankled deep in the mind of Constance Vernon. The image of her dying father, his complaints, his accusations (the justice of which she never for an instant questioned), rose up before her in the brightest hours of the dance and the revel. She was not one of those women whose meek and gentle nature would fly what wounds them: Constance had resolved to conquer. Despising glitter, and gaiety, and show, she burnt, she thirsted for

power—a power which could retaliate the insults she fancied she had received, and should turn the condescension of the great into homage. This object, which every casual word, every heedless glance from another, fixed deeper and deeper in her heart, took a sort of sanctity from the associations with which she linked it—her father's memory, and his dying breath.

At this moment in which we have portrayed her, all these restless, and sore, and haughty feelings were busy within; but they were combated, even while the more fiercely aroused, by one soft and tender thought—the image of Godolphin—of Godolphin, the spendthrift heir of a broken fortune and a fallen house. She felt too deeply that she loved him; and, ignorant of his worldlier qualities, imagined that he loved her with all the devotion of that romance, and the ardour of that

genius which appeared to her to compose his character. But this persuasion gave her now no delightful emotion. Convinced that she ought to reject him, his image only coloured with sadness those objects and that ambition which she had hitherto regarded with an exulting pride. She was not the less bent on the grand dreams of her destiny; but the glory and the illusion had fallen from them. She had taken an insight into futurity, and felt, that to enjoy power was to lose happiness. Yet, with this full conviction, she forsook the happiness, and clung to the power. Alas! for our best and wisest theories, our problems, our systems, our philosophy! Human beings will never cease to mistake the means for the end; and, despite the dogmas of sages, our conduct does *not* depend on our convictions.

Carriage after carriage had rolled beneath the windows of the room where Constance sat

and still she moved not ; until, at length, a certain composure, as if the result of some determination, stole over her features. The brilliant and transparent hues returned to her cheek ; and, as she rose and stood erect, with a certain calmness and energy on her lip and forehead, perhaps her beauty had never seemed of so lofty and august a cast. In passing through the chamber, she stopped for a moment opposite the mirror that reflected her stately shape in its full height. Beauty is so truly the weapon of woman, that it is as impossible for her, even in grief, wholly to forget its effect, as it is for the dying warrior to look with indifference on the sword with which he has won his trophies or his fame. Nor was Constance that evening *disposed* to be indifferent to the effect she should produce. She looked on the reflection of herself with a feeling of triumph, not arising from vanity alone.

And when did mirror ever give back a form more worthy of a Pericles to worship, or an Apelles to paint? Though but little removed from the common height, the impression Constance always gave was that of a person much taller than she really was. A certain majesty in the turn of the head, the fall of the shoulders, the breadth of the brow, and the exceeding calmness of the features, invested her with an air which I have never seen equalled by any one, but which, had Pasta been a beauty, she might have possessed. But there was nothing hard or harsh in this majesty. Whatsoever of a masculine nature Constance might have inherited, nothing masculine, nothing not exquisitely feminine, was visible in her person. Her shape was rounded, and sufficiently full to show, that in middle age its beauty would be preserved by that richness and freshness which a moderate increase of the proportions

always gives to the sex. Her arms and hands were, and are, even to this day, of a beauty the more striking, because it is so rare. Nothing in any European country is more uncommon than an arm really beautiful both in hue and shape. In any assembly we go to, however aristocratic, what miserable bones, what angular elbows, what red skins, do we see under the cover of those capacious sleeves, which are only one whit less ugly. At the time I speak of, those coverings were not worn; and the white, round, dazzling arm of Constance, bare almost to the shoulder, was girded by dazzling gems, which at once set off, and were foiled by, the beauty of nature. Her hair was of the most luxuriant, and of the deepest, black; and it was worn in a fashion—then uncommon, without being *bizarre*—now hacknied by the plainest faces, though adapted only to suit the highest order of

beauty; — I mean, that simple and classic fashion to which the French have given a name borrowed from Calypso, but which appears to me suited as much to an intellectual as a voluptuous goddess. Her long lashes, and a brow delicately but darkly pencilled, gave additional eloquence to an eye of the deepest blue, and a classic contour to a profile so slightly aquiline, that it was commonly considered Grecian. That necessary completion to all real beauty of either sex, the short and curved upper lip, terminated in the most dazzling teeth, and the ripe and dewy under lip added to what was noble in her beauty that charm also which is exclusively feminine. Her complexion was capricious; now pale, now tinged with the pink of the sea-shell, or the softest shade of the rose-leaf: but in either it was so transparent, that you doubted which became her the most. To these attrac-

tions, add a throat, a bust of the most dazzling whiteness, and the justest and most chiselled proportions; a foot, whose least beauty was its smallness; and a waist narrow — not the narrowness of tenuity or constraint — but round, gradual, insensibly less in its compression:—and the person of Constance Vernon, in the bloom of her youth, is before you.

She passed with her quiet and stately step from her room, through one adjoining it, and which we stop to notice, because it was her customary sitting-room when not with Lady Erpingham. There had Godolphin, with the foreign but courtly freedom, the respectful and chivalric ease of his manners, often sought her; there had he lingered in order to detain her yet a moment and a moment longer from other company—seeking a sweet excuse in some remark on the books that strewed the tables, or

the music in that recess, or the forest scene from those windows through which the moon of autumn now stole with its own peculiar power to soften and subdue. As these recollections came across her, her step faltered and her colour faded from its glow: she paused a moment, cast a mournful glance round the room, and then tore herself away, descended the lofty staircase, passed the stone-hall melancholy with old banners and rusted crests, and bore her beauty and her busy heart into the thickening and gay crowd.

Her eye looked once more round for the graceful form of Godolphin: but he was not visible; and she had scarcely satisfied herself of this before Lord Erpingham, the hero of the evening, approached and claimed her hand.

“ I have just performed my duty,” said he, with a gallantry of speech not common to him, “ now for my reward. I have danced the first

dance with Lady Margaret Midgecombe: I come, according to your promise, to dance the second with you."

There was something in these words that stung one of the morbid remembrances in Miss Vernon's mind. Lady Margaret Midgecombe, in ordinary life, would have been thought a good-looking, vulgar girl:—she was a Duke's daughter, and she was termed a Hebe. Her little nose, and her fresh colour, and her silly but not unmalicious laugh, were called enchanting; and all irregularities of feature, and faults of shape, were absolutely turned into merits by that odd commendation, so common with us—"a deuced fine girl; none of your regular beauties."

Not only in the county of ——shire, but in London, had Lady Margaret Midgecombe been set up as the rival beauty of Constance Vernon. And Constance, far too lovely, too

cold, too proud, not to acknowledge beauty in others, where it really existed, was nevertheless unaffectedly indignant at a comparison so unworthy : she even, at times, despised her own claims to admiration, since claims so immeasurably inferior could be put into competition with them. Added to this sore feeling for Lady Margaret, was one created by Lady Margaret's mother.—The Duchess of Winstoun was a woman of ordinary birth—the daughter of a peer of great wealth but new family. She had married, however, one of the most powerful dukes in the peerage ;—a stupid, heavy, pompous man, with four castles, two parks, a coal-mine, a tin-mine, six boroughs, and about thirty livings. Inactive and reserved, the Duke was seldom seen in public : the care of supporting his rank devolved on the Duchess ; and she supported it with as much solemnity of purpose as if she had been a cheesemonger's daughter. Stately, insolent,

and coarse ;—asked everywhere ; insulting all ; hated and courted ; such was the Duchess of Winstoun, and such, perhaps, have been other duchesses before her.

Be it understood that, at that day, Fashion had not risen to the despotism it now enjoys : it took its colouring from Power, not controlled it. I shall show, indeed, how much of its present condition that *Fashion* owes to the Heroine of these Memoirs. The Duchess of Winstoun could not be now that great person she was then : there is a certain good taste in Fashion which repels the mere insolence of Rank—which requires persons to be either agreeable, or brilliant, or at least original—which weighs stupid dukes in a righteous balance, and finds vulgar duchesses wanting. But, in lack of this new authority—this moral sebastocrator between the Sovereign and the dignity hitherto considered next to the Sovereign's—her Grace of Winstoun exercised with

impunity the rights of insolence. She had taken an especial dislike to Constance :—partly, because the few good judges of beauty, who care neither for rank nor report, had very unreservedly placed Miss Vernon beyond the reach of all competition with her daughter ; and principally, because the high spirit and keen irony of Constance had given more than once to the Duchess's effrontery so cutting and so public check, that she had felt with astonishment and rage there was one woman in that world—that woman too unmarried—who could retort rudeness to the Duchess of Winstoun. Spiteful, however, and numerous were the things she said of Miss Vernon, when Miss Vernon was absent ; and haughty beyond measure were the inclination of her head and the tone of her voice when Miss Vernon was present. If, therefore, Constance was disliked by the Duchess, we may readily believe that she

returned the dislike. The very name aroused her spleen and her pride; and it was with a feeling all a woman's, though scarcely feminine in the amiable sense of the word, that she learnt to whom the honour of Lord Erpingham's precedence had been (though necessarily) given.

As Lord Erpingham led her to her place, a buzz of admiration and enthusiasm followed her steps. This pleased Erpingham more than, at that moment, it did Constance. Already intoxicated by her beauty, he was proud of the effect it produced on others—for that effect was a compliment to his taste. He excited himself to be agreeable; nay, more, to be fascinating: he affected a low voice; and he attempted—poor man!—to flatter.

The Duchess of Winstoun and her daughter sat behind on an elevated bench. They saw with especial advantage the attentions with which one of the greatest of England's Earls

honoured the daughter of one of the greatest of England's orators. They were shocked at his want of dignity.—Constance perceived their chagrin, and she lent a more pleased and attentive notice to Lord Erpingham's compliments: her eyes sparkled and her cheek blushed; and the good folks around—admiring Lord Erpingham's immense whiskers—thought Constance in love.

It was just at this time that Percy Godolphin entered the room.

Although Godolphin's person was not of a showy order, there was something about him that always arrested attention. His air; his carriage; his long, fair locks; his rich and foreign habit of dress, which his high bearing and intellectual countenance redeemed from coxcombry;—all, united, gave something remarkable and distinguished to his appearance: and the interest attached to his fortunes, and

to his social reputation for genius and eccentricity, could not fail of increasing the effect he produced when his name was known.

From the throng of idlers that gathered around him; from the bows of the great and the smiles of the fair; Godolphin, however, directed his whole notice—his whole soul—to the spot which was hallowed by Constance Vernon. He saw her engaged with a man rich, powerful, and handsome. He saw that she listened to her partner with evident interest—that he addressed her with evident admiration. His heart sank within him; he felt faint and sick: then came anger—mortification; then agony and despair. All his former resolutions—all his prudence, his worldliness, his caution, vanished at once: he felt only that he loved, that he was supplanted, that he was undone. The dark and fierce passions of his youth, of a nature in reality wild and vehement, swept

away at once the projects and the fabrics of that shallow and chill philosophy he had borrowed from the world, and deemed the wisdom of the closet. A cottage and a desert with Constance—Constance all his, heart and hand—would have been Paradise: he would have nursed no other ambition, nor dreamt of a reward beyond.—Such effect has jealousy upon us. We confide—and we hesitate to accept a boon: we are jealous—and we would lay down life to attain it.

“What a handsome fellow Erpingham is!” said a young man in a cavalry regiment.

Godolphin heard, and groaned audibly.

“And what a devilish handsome girl he is dancing with,” answered another young man, from Oxford.

“Oh, Miss Vernon!—By Jove, he seems smitten. What a capital thing it would be for her!”

“ And for him too !” cried the more chivalrous Oxonian.

“ Humph !” said the officer.

“ I heard,” renewed the Oxonian, “ that she was to be married to young Godolphin. He was staying here a short time ago. They rode and walked together. What a lucky fellow he has been ! I don’t know any one I should like to see so much.”

“ Hush !” said a third person, looking at Godolphin.

Percy moved on.—Accomplished and self-collected as he usually was, he could not wholly conceal the hell within. His brow grew knit and gloomy: he scarcely returned the salutations he received; and moving out of the crowd, he stole to a seat behind a large pillar—and, scarcely seen by any one, fixed his eyes on the form and movements of Miss Vernon.

It so happened that he had placed himself in the vicinity of the Duchess of Winstoun, and within hearing of the conversation that I am about to record.

The dance being over, Lord Erpingham led Constance to a seat close by Lady Margaret Midgecombe. The Duchess had formed her plan of attack ; and, rising as she saw Constance *within reach*, approached her with an air that affected civility.

“ How do you, Miss Vernon ? I am happy to see you looking so well. What truth in the report, eh ? ” and the Duchess showed her teeth — *videlicet*, smiled.

“ What report does your grace allude to ? ”

“ Nay, nay ; I am sure Lord Erpingham has heard it as well as myself ; and I wish for *your* sake (a slight emphasis), indeed, for both your sakes, that it may be true.”

“ To wait till the Duchess of Winstoun

speaks intelligibly, would be a waste of her time and my own ;” said the haughty Constance, with the rudeness in which she then delighted, and for which she has since become known. But the Duchess was not to be offended until she had completed her manœuvre.

“ Well, now,” said she, turning to Lord Erpingham, “ I appeal to you : is not Miss Vernon to be married very soon to Mr. Godolphin ? I am sure (with an affected good-nature and compassion that stung Constance to the quick), I am sure I *hope* so.”

“ Upon my word you amaze me,” said Lord Erpingham, opening to their fullest extent the large, round, hazel eyes, for which he was so justly celebrated. “ I never heard this before.”

“ Oh ! a secret as yet,” said the Duchess : “ very well ! I can keep a secret.”

Lady Margaret looked down, and laughed prettily.

“ I thought till now,” said Constance, with grave composure, “ that no person could be more contemptible than one who *collects* idle reports : I now find I was wrong : a person infinitely more contemptible is one who *invents* them.”

The rude Duchess, beat at her own weapons, blushed with anger even through her rouge : but Constance turned away, and, still leaning on Lord Erpingham’s arm, sought another seat ;—that seat, on the opposite side of the pillar behind which Godolphin sat—was still within his hearing,

“ Upon my word, Miss Vernon,” said Erpingham, “ I admire your spirit. Nothing like setting down those absurd people who try to tease one, and think one dares not retort. But pray—I hope I’m not impertinent—pray may I ask if this rumour have *any* truth in it ?”

“ Certainly not,” said Constance, with great effort, but in a clear tone.

“ No: I should have thought not; I should have thought not. Godolphin’s much too poor, much too poor, for you. Miss Vernon is not the lady to marry for love in a cottage, is she?”

Constance sighed.

That soft, low tone thrilled to Godolphin’s very heart. He bent forward: he held his breath: he thirsted for her voice; for some tone, some word in answer; it came not at that moment.

“ You remember,” renewed the Earl, “ you remember Miss L——: no: she was before your time. Well! she married S——, much such another fellow as Godolphin. He had not a shilling: but he lived well; had a house in Mayfair; gave dinners; hunted at Melton, and so forth: in short, he played high. She had about ten thousand pounds. They married, and lived for two years so comfortably, you have no idea. Every one envied them. They did not keep a close carriage, but he used to

drive her out to dinners in his French cabriolet.* There was no show—no pomp: every thing deuced neat, though: quite love in a cottage—only the cottage was in Curzon-street. At length, however, the cards turned: S—— lost every thing: owed more than he could ever pay: we were forced to cut him; and his relation, Lord ——, coming into the Ministry a year afterwards, got him a place in the Customs. They live at Pentonville: he wears a pepper-and-salt coat, and she a mob-cap, with pink ribbons: they have five hundred a-year, and ten children. Such was the fate of S.——’s wife; such may be the fate of Godolphin’s. Oh, Miss Vernon could not marry *him!*”

“You are right, my lord,” said Constance, with emphasis; “but you take too much licence in expressing your opinion.”

* Then uncommon.

Before Lord Erpingham could stammer forth his apology, they heard a slight noise behind: they turned: Godolphin had risen. His countenance, always inclined to a calm severity—for thought is usually severe in its outward aspect—bent now on both the speakers with so dark and menacing an aspect, that the stout Earl felt his heart stand still for a moment; and Constance was appalled as if it had been the apparition, and not the living form of her lover that she beheld. But scarcely had they seen this expression of countenance, ere it changed. With a cold and polished smile, a relaxed brow, and profound inclination of his form, Godolphin greeted the two; and, passing from his seat with a slow step, glided among the crowd, and vanished.

What a strange thing, after all, is a great assembly! An immense mob of persons, who feel for each other the profoundest indifference

—met together to join in amusements, which the great majority of them consider wearisome beyond conception. How unintellectual, how uncivilized, such a scene, and such actors! What a remnant of barbarous times, when people danced because they had nothing to say! Were there nothing ridiculous in dancing, there would be nothing ridiculous in seeing wise men dance. But that sight would be ludicrous, because of the disparity between the mind and the occupation. However, we have some excuse; we go to these assemblies to sell our daughters, or corrupt our neighbours' wives. A ball-room is nothing more or less than a great market-place of beauty. For my part, I like making my purchases in a less public mart.

“Come, Godolphin, a glass of champagne,” cried the young Lord Belvoir, as they sat near each other at the splendid supper.

“With all my heart; but not from that bottle! we must have a new one; for this glass is pledged to Lady Delmour, and I would not drink to her health but from the first sparkle! Nothing tame, nothing insipid, nothing that has lost its first freshness, can be dedicated to one so beautiful and young.”

The fresh bottle was opened, and Godolphin bowed over his glass to Lord Belvoir’s sister—a Beauty, and a Blue. Lady Delmour admired Godolphin, and she was flattered by a compliment that no one wholly educated in England would have had the gallant courage to utter across a crowded table.

“You have been dancing?” said she.

“No!”

“What then?”

“What then?” said Godolphin; “Ah, Lady Delmour, do not ask.”—The look that accompanied the words, supplied them with a mean-

ing. "Need I add," said he, in a lower voice, "that I have been thinking of the most beautiful person present?"

"Pooh!" said Lady Delmour, turning away her head.

Now, that *pooh* is a very significant word. On the lips of a man of business, it denotes contempt for romance; on the lips of a politician, it rebukes a theory. With that monosyllable, a philosopher massacres a fallacy: by those four letters, a rich man gets rid of a beggar. But in the rosy mouth of a woman, the harshness vanishes, the disdain becomes encouragement. "Pooh!" says the lady when you tell her she is handsome; but she smiles when she says it. With the same reply she receives your protestation of love, and blushes as she receives. With men it is the sternest, with women the softest, exclamation in the language.

“Pooh!” said Lady Delmour, turning away her head:—and Godolphin was in singular spirits. What a strange thing that we should call such hilarity from our gloom! The stroke induces the flash; excite the nerves by jealousy, by despair, and with the proud, you only trace the excitement by the mad mirth and hysterical laughter it creates.

Godolphin was charming *comme un amour*, and the young Countess was delighted with his gallantry.

“Did you ever love?” asked she tenderly, as they sat alone after supper.

“Alas, yes!” said he.

“How often?”

“Read Marmontel’s story of the ‘Three Vials:’ I have no other answer.”

“Oh, what a beautiful tale that is! The whole history of a man’s heart is contained in it. Fancy, Passion, Love! behold the Three

Vials ; but, how few ever drink of the third !”

While Godolphin was thus talking with Lady Delmour, his whole soul was with Constance ; of her only he thought, and on her he thirsted for revenge. There is a curious phenomenon in love, showing how much vanity has to do with even the best species of it ; when, for your mistress to prefer another, changes all your affection into hatred, is it the *loss* of the mistress, or her *preference* to the other ? The last, to be sure : for if the former, you would only grieve—but jealousy does not make you grieve, it makes you rage ; it does not sadden, it stings. After all, as we grow old, and look back on the “master passion,” how we smile at the fools it made of us—at the importance we attach to it—at the millions that have been governed by it ! When we examine the passion of love, it is like examining the character of some great man ; we are astonished to perceive

the littlenesses that belong to it. We ask in wonder, "How come such effects from such a cause!"

Godolphin continued talking sentiment with Lady Delmour until her lord, who was very fond of his carriage-horses, came up and took her away; and then, almost glad to be relieved, Percy sauntered into the ball-room, where, though the crowd was somewhat thinned, the dance was continued with that spirit which always seems to increase as the night advances.

For my own part, I now and then look late in at a ball as a warning and grave memento of the flight of time. No amusement belongs of right so essentially to the young, in their first youth,—to the unthinking, the intoxicated,—to those whose blood is an elixir. There, above all places, do I recognize the vast gulf between me and my youth.

"If Constance be woman," said Godolphin

to himself, as he returned to the ball-room, "I will yet humble her to my will. I have not learned the science so long, to be now foiled in the first moment I have seriously wished to triumph."

As this thought inspired and excited him, he moved along at some distance from, but carefully within the sight of, Constance. He paused by Lady Margaret Midgecombe. He addressed her. Notwithstanding the insolence and the ignorance of the Duchess of Winstoun, he was well received by both mother and daughter. Some persons there are, in all times and in all spheres, who command a certain respect, bought neither by riches, rank, nor even scrupulous morality of conduct. They win it by the reputation that talent alone can win them, and which yet is not always the reputation of talent. No man, even in the frivolous societies of the great, obtains homage

without certain qualities which, had they been happily directed, would have conducted him to fame. Had the attention of a Grammont, or of a C——, been early turned towards what *ought* to be the objects desired, who can doubt that, instead of the heroes of a circle, they might have been worthy of becoming names for posterity. Thus, the genius of Godolphin had drawn around him an *éclat* which made even the haughtiest willing to receive and to repay his notice ; and Lady Margaret actually blushed with pleasure when he asked her to dance. A foreign dance, then only very partially known in England, had been called for : few were acquainted with it,—those only who had been abroad ; and as the movements seemed to require peculiar grace of person, some even among those few declined, through modesty, the exhibition.

To this dance Godolphin led Lady Mar-

garet. All crowded round to see the performers ; and as each went through the giddy and intoxicating maze, they made remarks on the awkwardness, or the singularity, or the impropriety of the dance. But when Godolphin began, the murmurs changed. The slow and stately measure, then adapted to the steps, was one in which the grace and symmetry of his person might eminently display itself. Lady Margaret was at least as well acquainted with the dance ; and the couple altogether so immeasurably excelled all competitors, that the rest, as if sensible of it, stopped one after the other ; and when Godolphin, perceiving that they were alone, stopped also, the spectators made their approbation more audible than approbation usually is in polished society.

As Godolphin paused, his eyes met those of Constance. There was not there the expression he had anticipated : there was neither the anger

of jealousy, nor the restlessness of offended vanity, nor the desire of conciliation, visible in those large and speaking orbs. A deep, a penetrating, a sad inquiry seemed to dwell in her gaze,—seemed anxious to pierce into his heart, and to discover whether there she possessed the power to wound, or whether each had been deceived: so at least seemed that fixed and melancholy intensesness of look to Godolphin. He left Lady Margaret abruptly: in an instant he was by the side of Constance.

“You must be delighted with this evening,” said he bitterly: “wherever I go I hear your praises: every one admires you; and he who does not admire so much as worship you, *he* alone is beneath your notice. He—born to such shattered fortunes,—he indeed might never *aspire* to that which titled and wealthy idiots deem they may *command*,—the hand of Constance Vernon.”

It was with a low and calm tone that Godolphin spoke. Constance turned deadly pale: her frame trembled; but she did not answer immediately. She moved to a seat retired a little from the busy crowd: Godolphin followed, and sat himself beside her; and then, with a slight effort, Constance spoke.

“ You heard what was said, Mr. Godolphin, and I grieve to think you did. If I offended you, however, forgive me, I pray you; I pray it sincerely, warmly. God knows I have suffered myself enough from idle words, and from the slighting opinion with which this hard world visits the poor, not to feel deep regret and shame if I wound, by like means, another, more especially—” Constance’s voice trembled —“ more especially *you!*”

As she spoke, she turned her eyes on Godolphin, and they were full of tears. The tenderness of her voice, her look, melted him

at once. Was it to him, indeed, that the haughty Constance addressed the words of kindness and apology?—to him whose extrinsic circumstances she had heard described as so unworthy of her, and, his reason told him, with such justice?

“ Oh, Miss Vernon !” said he, passionately ;
“ Miss Vernon—Constance—dear, dear Constance ! dare I call you so ? hear me one word. I love you with a love which leaves me no words to tell it. I know my faults, my poverty, my unworthiness : but—but—may I—may I hope ?”

And all the woman was in Constance’s cheek, as she listened. That cheek, how richly was it dyed ! Her eyes drooped ; her bosom heaved. How every word in those broken sentences sank into her heart ! never was a tone forgotten. The child may forget its mother, and the mother desert the child ; but

never, never from a woman's heart departs the memory of the first confession of love, from him whom she first loves! She lifted her eyes, and again withdrew them, and again gazed.

“This must not be,” at last she said; “no, no! it is folly, madness, in both!”

“Not so; nay, not so!” whispered Godolphin, in the softest notes of a voice that could never be harsh. “It may seem folly—madness if you will, that the brilliant and all-idolized Miss Vernon should listen to the vows of so lowly an adorer: but try me—prove me, and own—yes, you *will* own some years hence, that that folly has been happy beyond the happiness of prudence or ambition.”

“This!” answered Constance, struggling with her emotions; “this is no spot or hour for such a conference. Let us meet to-morrow—the western chamber.”

“ And the hour ?”

“ Twelve !”

“ And I may hope—till then ?”

Constance again grew pale ; and in a voice that, though it scarcely left her lips, struck coldness and dismay into his sudden and delighted confidence, answered,

“ No, Percy, there is no hope !—none !

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INTERVIEW.—THE CRISIS OF A LIFE.

THE western chamber was that I have mentioned as the one in which Constance usually fixed her retreat, when neither sociability nor state summoned her to the more public apartments. I should have said that Godolphin slept in the house; for, coming from a distance, and through country roads, Lady Erpingham had proffered him that hospitality, and he had willingly accepted it. Before the appointed hour, he was at the appointed spot.

He had passed the hours till then without

even seeking his pillow. In restless strides across his chamber, he had revolved those words with which Constance had seemed to deny the hopes she herself had created. All private and more selfish schemes, or reflections, had vanished, as by magic, from the mind of a man prematurely formed, but not yet wholly hardened, in the mould of worldly speculation. He thought no more of what he should relinquish in obtaining her hand: with the ardour of boyish and real love, he thought only of her. It was as if no world but the little spot in which she breathed and moved, existed. Poverty, privation, toil, the change of the manners and habits of his whole previous life, to those of professional enterprise and self-denial;—to all this he looked forward, not so much with calmness as with triumph.

“Be but Constance mine!” said he again and again; and again and again those fatal

words knocked at his heart, "No hope — none!" and he gnashed his teeth in very anguish, and muttered, "But mine she will not — she will never be!"

Still, however, before the hour of noon, something of his habitual confidence returned to him. He had succeeded, though but partially, in reasoning away the obvious meaning of the words; and he ascended to the chamber from the gardens, in which he had sought, by the air, to cool his mental fever, with a sentiment ominous and doubtful indeed, but still removed from despondency and despair.

The day was sad and heavy. A low, drizzling rain, and labouring yet settled clouds, which denied all glimpse to the sky, and seemed cursed into stagnancy by the absence of all wind or even breeze, increased by those associations we endeavour in vain to resist,

the dark and oppressive sadness of his thoughts.

He paused, as he laid his hand on the door of the chamber: he listened; and in the acute and painful life which seemed breathed into all his senses, he felt as he could have heard,—though without the room,—the very breath of Constance; or known, as by an inspiration, the presence of her beauty. He opened the door gently: all was silence and desolation for him—Constance was not there!

He felt, however, as if that absence was a relief. He breathed more freely, and seemed to himself more prepared for the meeting. He took his station by the recess of the window: in vain—he could rest in no spot: he walked to and fro, pausing only for a moment as some object before him reminded him of past and more tranquil hours. The books he had admired, and which, at his departure, had been

left in their usual receptacles at another part of the house, he now discovered on the tables: they opened of themselves at the passages he had read aloud to Constance: those passages, in his presence, she had not seemed to admire; he was inexpressibly touched to perceive that, in his absence, they had become dear to her. As he turned with a beating heart from this silent proof of affection, he was startled by the sudden and almost living resemblance to Constance, which struck upon him in a full-length picture opposite — the picture of her father. That picture, by one of the best of our great modern masters of the art, had been taken of Vernon in the proudest epoch of his prosperity and fame. He was pourtrayed in the attitude in which he had uttered one of the most striking sentences of one of his most brilliant orations: the hand was raised, the foot advanced, the chest expanded. Life, energy,

command, flashed from the dark eye, breathed from the dilated nostril, broke from the inspired lip. That noble brow—those modelled features—that air so full of the royalty of genius—how startlingly did they resemble the softer lineaments of Constance.

Arrested, in spite of himself, by the skill of the limner and the characteristics of the portrait, Godolphin stood motionless and gazing, till the door opened, and Constance herself stood before him. She smiled faintly, but with sweetness, as she approached ; and seating herself, motioned him to a chair at a little distance. He obeyed the gesture in silence.

“ Godolphin !” said she, softly. — At the sound of her voice he raised his eyes from the ground, and fixed them on her countenance with a look so full of an imploring and earnest meaning, — so expressive of the passion, the suspense, of his heart, that Constance felt her

voice cease at once. But he saw, as he gazed, how powerful had been his influence. Not a vestige of bloom was on her cheek: her very lips were colourless: her eyes were swollen with weeping; and though she seemed very calm and self-possessed, all her wonted majesty of mien was gone! The form seemed to shrink within itself. Humbleness and sorrow—deep, passionate, but quiet sorrow,—had supplanted the haughtiness and the elastic freshness of her beauty.—“Godolphin,” she repeated, after a pause, “answer me truly and with candour: not with the world’s gallantry; but with a sincere, a plain avowal.—Were you not in your unguarded expressions last night—were you not excited by the surprise, the passion, of the moment? Were you not uttering what, had you been actuated only by a calm and premeditated prudence, you would at least have suppressed?”

“ Miss Vernon,” replied Godolphin, “ all that I said last night, I now, in calmness and with deliberate premeditation, repeat: all that I can dream of happiness is in your hands.”

“ I would, indeed, that I could disbelieve you,” said Constance, sorrowfully: “ I have considered deeply on your words. I am touched—made grateful—proud—yes, truly proud—by your confessed affection—but—”

“ Oh Constance!” cried Godolphin, in a sudden and agonized voice—and rising, he flung himself impetuously at her feet—“ Constance! do not reject me!”

He seized her hand: it struggled not with his. He gazed on her countenance: it was dyed in blushes; and before those blushes vanished, her agitation found relief in tears, which flowed fast and full.

“ Beloved!” said Godolphin, with a solemn tenderness, “ why struggle with your heart?

That heart I read at this moment: *that* is not averse to me.”—Constance wept on.—“I know what you would say, and what you feel;” continued Godolphin: “you think that I—that we both are poor: that you could ill bear the humiliations of that haughty poverty which those born to higher fortunes so irksomely endure. You tremble to link your fate with one who has been imprudent—lavish—selfish, if you will. You recoil before you entrust your happiness to a man who, if he wreck *that*, can offer you nothing in return: no rank—no station—nothing to heal a bruised heart, or cover its wound, at least, in the rich disguises of power and wealth. Am I not right, Constance?—Do I not read your mind?”

“No!” said Constance, with energy. “Had I been born any man’s daughter, but his from whom I take my name; were I the same in

all things, mind and heart, save in one feeling, one remembrance, one object—that I am now ; God is my witness that I would not cast a thought upon poverty—upon privation : that I would — nay, I do — I *do* confide in your vows, your affection. If you have erred, I know it not. If any but you tell me you have erred, I believe them not. You I trust wholly and implicitly. God, I say, is my witness that, did I obey the voice of my selfish heart, I would gladly, proudly, share and follow your fortunes. You mistake me if you think sordid and vulgar ambition can only influence me. No ! I could be worthy of you ! The daughter of John Vernon could be a worthy wife to the man of indigence and genius. In your poverty I could soothe you ; in your labours I could support you ; in your reverses console, in your prosperity triumph. But—but, it must not be. Go, Godolphin — dear

Godolphin! There are thousands better and fairer than I am, who will do for you as I would have done; but who possess the power I have not—who, instead of sharing, can raise your fortunes. Go!—and if it comfort, if it soothe you, believe that I have not been insensible to your generosity, your love. My best wishes, my fondest prayers, my dearest hopes, are yours.”

Blinded by her tears, subdued by her emotions, Constance was still herself. She rose; she extricated her hand from Godolphin's; she turned to leave the room. But Godolphin, still kneeling, caught hold of her robe, and gently, but effectually, detained her.

“The picture you have painted,” said he, “do not destroy at once. You have portrayed yourself my soother, guide, restorer. You *can*, indeed you can, be this. You do not know me, Constance. Let me say one

word for myself. Hitherto, I have shunned fame and avoided ambition. Life has seemed to me so short, and all that even glory wins so poor, that I have thought no labour worth the price of a single hour of pleasure and enjoyment. For you, how joyfully will I renounce my code. For myself, I could ask no honour : for you, I will labour for all. No toil shall be dry to me—no pleasure shall decoy. I will renounce my idle and desultory pursuits. I will enter the great public arena, where all who come armed with patience and with energy are sure to win. Constance, I am not without talents, though they have slept within me ; say but the word, and you know not what they can produce.”

An irresolution in Constance was felt as a sympathy by Godolphin ; he continued,—

“ We are both desolate in the world, Constance ; we are orphans—friendless, fortuneless. Yet both have made our way without friends,

and commanded our associates, though without fortune. Does not this declare we have that within us which, when we are united, can still exalt or conquer our destiny? And we—we—alone in the noisy and contentious world with which we strive—we shall turn, after each effort, to our own hearts, and find there a comfort and a shelter. All things will bind us closer and closer to each other. The thought of our past solitude, the hope of our future objects, will only feed the fountain of our present love. And how much sweeter, Constance, will be honours to you, if we thus win them; sanctified as they will be, by the sacrifices we have made; by the thought of the many hours in which we desponded, yet took consolation from each other; by the thought how we sweetened even mortifications by sympathy, and made even the lowest successes noble by the endearing associations with which we allied

them. How much sweeter to you will be such honours than those which you might command at once, but accompanied by a cold heart; rendered wearisome because won with ease, and low because undignified by fame. Oh, Constance! am I not heard?—Have not love, nature, sense, triumphed?”

As he spoke, he had risen gently, and wound his arms around her not reluctant form: her head declined upon his bosom; her hand was surrendered to his; and his kiss stole softly and unhidden to her cheek. At that instant, the fate of both hung on a very hair. How different might the lot, the character, of each have been, had Constance's lips pronounced the words that her heart already recorded! And she might have done so; but, as she raised her eyes, the same object that had before affected Godolphin came vividly upon her, and changed, as by an electric shock, the whole current of

her thoughts. Full and immediately before her was the picture of her father. The attitude there delineated, so striking at all times, seemed to Constance at that moment more than ever impressive, and even awful in the *livingness* of its command. It was the face of Vernon in the act of speech—of warning—of reproof; such as she had seen it often in private life; such as she had seen it in his bitter maledictions on his hollow friends at the close of his existence: nay, such as she had seen it,—only more fearful, and ghastly with the hues of death, — in his last hours; in those hours in which he had pledged her to the performance of his revenge, and bade her live not for love but the memory of her sire.

With the sight of that face rushed upon her the dark and solemn recollections of that time and of that vow. The weakness of love vanished before the returning force of a sentiment

nursed through her earliest years, fed by her dreams, strengthened by her studies, and hardened, by the daring energies of a nature lofty yet fanatical, into the rule, the end, nay, the very religion of life! She tore herself away from the surprised and dismayed Godolphin; she threw herself on her knees before the picture; her lips moved rapidly; the rapid and brief prayer for forgiveness was over, and Constance rose a new being. She turned to Godolphin, and, lifting her arm towards the picture, as she regarded, with her bright and kindling eyes, the face of her lover, she said:—

“As you think now, thought he whose voice speaks to you from the canvass; he, who pursued the path that you would tread; who, through the same toil, the same pursuit, that you would endure, used the same powers and the same genius you would command; he, who won,—what you might win also at last,—the

smile of princes, the trust of nobles, the shifting and sandy elevation which the best, and wisest, and greatest statesmen in this country, if unbacked by a sordid and caballing Oligarchy, can alone obtain. He warns you from that hollow distinction,—from its wretched consummation. Oh, Godolphin!” she continued, subdued, and sinking from a high-wrought but momentary paroxysm, uncommon to her collected character, “Oh, Godolphin! I saw that man dying, deserted, lonely, cursed by his genius, ruined by his prosperity. I saw him dying,—*die*,—of a broken and trampled heart. Could I doom another victim to the same course, and the same perfidy, and the same fate? Could I, with a silent heart, watch by that victim; could I, viewing his certain doom, elate him with false hopes?—No, no! fly from me,—from the thought of such a destiny. Marry one who can bring you wealth, and

support you with rank ; *then* be ambitious, if you will. Leave me to fulfil my doom,—MY VOW ; and to think, however wretched I may be, that I have not inflicted a permanent wretchedness on you.”

Godolphin sprang forward ; but the door closed upon his eyes ; and he saw Constance — as Constance *Vernon* — no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

A RAKE AND EXQUISITE OF THE BEST (WORST) SCHOOL.—A CONVERSATION ON A THOUSAND MATTERS.—THE DECLENSION OF THE *sui profusus* INTO THE *alieni appetens*.

THERE was, in the day I now refer to, a certain house in Chesterfield Street, May-Fair, which few young men anxious for the *éclat* of society passed without a wish for the acquaintance of the inmate. To that small and dingy mansion, with its verandahs of dusky green, and its blinds perpetually drawn, there attached an interest, a consideration, and a mystery. Thither, at the dusk of night, were the hired car-

riages of intrigue wont to repair, and dames to alight, careful seemingly of concealment, yet wanting, perhaps, even a reputation to conceal. Few, at the early hours of morn, passed that street in their way home from some glittering revel without noticing some three or four chariots in waiting;—or without hearing from within the walls, the sounds of protracted festivity. That house was the residence of a man who had never done any thing in public, and yet was the most noted personage in “Society:” in early life, the all-accomplished *Lovelace*; in later years mingling the graces with the decayed heart and the want of principle of a *Grammont*. Feared, contemned, loved, hated, ridiculed, honoured, the very genius, the very personification, of a civilized and profligate life seemed embodied in Augustus Saville. Hitherto we have spoken of, let us now describe, him.

Born to the poor fortunes and equivocal station of cadet, in a noble but impoverished house, he had passed his existence in a round of lavish, but never inelegant, dissipation. Unlike other men, whom youth, and money, and the flush of health, and aristocratic indulgence, allure to follies, which shock the taste as well as the morality, of the wise, Augustus Saville had never committed an error which was not varnished by grace, and limited by a profound and worldly discretion. A seducer, an adulterer, a systematic votary of pleasure — no woman had ever through him lost her reputation or her sphere. No separations, no divorces, no vulgar scandal, no recurrence to courts of law, had ever been the consequence of his intrigues; whether it was that he corrupted into fortunate dissimulation, the minds that he betrayed into guilt; or whether he chose his victims with so just a knowledge of

their characters, and of the circumstances round them, that he might be sure the secrecy maintained by himself would scarcely be divulged elsewhere. All the world attributed to Augustus Saville, the most various and consummate success in that quarter which the lighter part of the world most envies, and in which it most jealously denies success: yet no one could say exactly who, among the many he addressed, had been the object of his triumph. The same quiet, and yet victorious discretion, waited upon all he did. Never had he stooped to win celebrity from horses or from carriages; nothing in his equipages showed the ambition to be distinguished from another; least of all, did he affect that most displeasing of minor ostentations, that offensive exaggeration of neatness, that *outré* simplicity, which our young nobles and aspiring bankers so ridiculously think it *bon ton* to assume. No har-

ness, industriously avoiding brass ; no liveries, pretending to the tranquillity of a gentleman's dress ; no pannels disdaining the armorial attributes of which real dignity should neither be ashamed nor proud—converted plain taste into a display of plainness. He seldom appeared at races, and never hunted ; though he was profound master of the calculations in the first ; and was, as regarded the second, allowed to be one of the most perfect masters of horsemanship in his time. So, in his dress, while he chose even sedulously what became him most, he avoided the appearance of coxcombry, by a disregard to minutia. He did not value himself on the perfection of his boot ; and suffered a wrinkle in his coat without a sigh : yet, even the exquisites of the time allowed that no one was more gentleman-like in the *tout-ensemble* : and while he sought by other means than dress to attract, he never even in

dress offended. Carefully shunning the character of the professed wit, or the general talker, he was yet piquant, shrewd, and animated to the few persons whom he addressed, or with whom he associated: and though he had refused all offers to enter public life, he was sufficiently master of the graver subjects that agitated the times, to impress even those best acquainted with them with a belief in his information and his talents.

But he was born poor ; and yet he had lived for nearly thirty years as a rich man ! What was his secret ?—he had lived upon others ! At all games of science, he played with a masterly skill ; and in those wherein luck preponderates, there are always chances for a cool and systematic calculation. He had been, indeed, suspected of unfair play ; but the charge had never cooled the eagerness with which he had been courted. With far better taste, and

far more popularity and estimation than Brummell, he obtained an equal, though a more secret sway. Every one was desirous to know him: without his acquaintance, the young debutant felt that he wanted the qualification to social success: by his intimacy, even vulgarity became the rage. It was true that, as no woman's disgrace was confessedly traced to him, so neither was any man's ruin—save only in the doubtful instance of the unfortunate Johnstone. He never won of any person, however ardent, more than a certain portion of his fortune—the rest of his undoing he left to his satellites; nay, even those who had in reality most reason to complain of him, never perceived his due share in their impoverishment. It was common enough to hear men say, “Ah! Saville, I wish I had taken your advice, and left off while I had yet half my fortune!” They did not accurately heed that

the other half was Saville's; because the first half had excited, not ruined them.

Besides this method of making money, so strictly social, Saville had also applied his keen intellect and shrewd sense to other speculations. Cheap houses, cheap horses, fluctuations in the funds, all descriptions of property, (except perhaps stolen goods,) had passed under his earnest attention; and in most cases, such speculations had eminently succeeded. He was therefore now, in his middle age, and still unmarried, a man decidedly wealthy; having, without ever playing the miser, without ever stinting a luxury, or denying a wish, turned nothing into something, poverty into opulence.

It was noon; and Saville was slowly finishing his morning repast, and conversing with a young man stretched on a sofa opposite in a listless attitude. The room was in perfect keeping

with the owner : there was neither velvet, nor gilding, nor *buhl*, nor *marquetric*—all of which would have been inconsistent with the moderate size of the apartment. But the furniture was new, massive, costly, and luxurious without the ostentation of luxury. A few good pictures, and several exquisite busts and figures in bronze, upon marble pedestals, gave something classic and graceful to the aspect of the room. In the back drawing-room, looking over Lord Chesterfield's gardens, a small conservatory connected with the window, filled with rich exotics, made the only feature in the apartment that might have seemed, to a fastidious person, effeminate or unduly voluptuous.

Saville himself was about forty-seven years of age : of a person slight and thin, without being emaciated : a not ungraceful, though habitual stoop, diminished his height, which might be a little above the ordinary standard. In his

youth he had been handsome ; but in his person there was now little trace of any attraction beyond that of a manner remarkably soft and insinuating : yet in his narrow though high forehead—his sharp aquiline nose, grey eye, and slightly sarcastic curve of lip, something of his character betrayed itself. You saw, or fancied you saw in them, the shrewdness, the delicacy of tact ; the consciousness of duping others ; the subtle and intuitive, yet bland and noiseless penetration into the characters around him,—which made the prominent features of his mind. And indeed, of all qualities, dissimulation is that which betrays itself the most often in the physiognomy.—A fortunate thing, that the long habit of betraying should find at times the index in which to betray itself.

“ But you don't tell me, my dear Godolphin,” said Saville, as he broke the toast into his chocolate,—“ you don't tell me how the world

employed itself at Rome. Were there any of the true calibre there? — steady fellows, yet ardent, like myself?—men who make us feel our strength and put it forth—with whom we cannot dally or idle—who require our coolness of head, clearness of memory, ingenuity of stratagem—in a word, men of my ART—the art of play :—were there any such?”

“ Not many, but enough for honour ;” said Godolphin : “ for myself, I have long forsworn gambling for profit.”

“ Ah ! I always thought you wanted that perseverance which belongs to strength of character. And how stand your resources now ? Sufficient to recommence the world here with credit and *éclat* ?”

“ Ay, were I so disposed, Saville. - But I shall return to Italy. Within a month hence, I shall depart.”

“ What ! and only just arrived in town ! An heir in possession !”

“ Of what ?”

“ The reputation of having succeeded to a property, the extent of which, if wise, you will tell to no one !—Are you so young, Godolphin, as to imagine that it signifies one crumb of this bread what be the rent-roll of your estate, so long as you can obtain credit for any sum to which you are pleased to extend it?—Credit ! beautiful invention !—the moral new world to which we fly when banished from the old. Credit !—the true charity of Providence, by which they who otherwise would starve live in plenty, and despise the indigent rich. Credit !—admirable system, alike for those who live on it and the wiser few who live by it.—Will you borrow some money of me, Godolphin ?”

“ At what per centage ?”

“ Why, let me see : Funds are low ; I’ll be moderate. But stay ; be it with you as I did with George Sinclair. You shall have all you

want, and pay me with a premium, when you marry an heiress.—Why, man, you wince at the very word ‘ marry ! ’ ”

“ ’Tis a sore subject, Saville : one that makes a man think of halters.”

“ You are right :—I recognize my young pupil. Your old play-writers talked nonsense when they said men lost liberty of person by marriage. Men lose liberty, but it is the liberty of the mind. We cease to be independent of the world’s word, when we grow respectable with a wife, a fat butler, two children, and a family coach.—It makes a gentleman little better than a grocer or a king ! But you have seen Constance Vernon.—Why, out on this folly, Godolphin ! You turn away. Do you fancy that I did not penetrate your weakness the moment you mentioned her name ? — still less, do you fancy, my dear young friend, that I, who have lived through nearly half a century, and know our nature, and the whole thermometer

of our blood, think one jot the worse of you for forming a caprice, or a passion, if you will—for a woman that would set an anchoret, or, what is still colder, a worn-out debauchee, on fire? Bah! Godolphin, I am wiser than you take me for. And I will tell you more. For your sake, I am *happy* that you have incurred already this, our common, folly (which we all have once in a life,) and that the fit is over. I do not pry into your secrets; I know their delicacy. I do not ask which of you drew back; for, to have gone forward, to have married, would have been madness for both. Nay, it was an *impossibility*: it could not have happened to my pupil; the ablest, the subtlest, the wisest of my pupils. But, however it was broken off, I repeat that I am glad it happened. One is never sure of a man's wisdom, till he has been really and vainly in love. You know what that moralizing lump of absurdity, Lord Edouard, has said in the *Julie*;—‘the

path of the passions conducts us to philosophy !' It is true, very true : and now that the path has been fairly trod, the goal is at hand. *Now*, I can confide in your steadiness : now, I can feel that you will run no chance, in future, of over-appreciating that bauble, Woman. You will beg, borrow, steal, and exchange, or lose the jewel, with the same delicious excitement ; coupled with the same steady indifference, with which we play at a more scientific game, and for a more comprehensive reward. I say more comprehensive reward ; for how many women may we be able to buy by a judicious bet on the odd trick !"

"Your turn is sudden," said Godolphin, smiling, "and there is some justice in your reasoning. The fit *is* over ; and if ever I can be wise, I have entered on wisdom now. But talk of this no more."

"I will not," said Saville, whose unerring tact

had reached just the point where to stop, and who had led Godolphin through just that vein of conversation, half sentimentalizing, half sensible, all profligate, which seldom fails to win the ear of a man both of imagination and of the world. "I will not; and to vary the topic, I will turn egoist, and tell you *my* adventures."

With this, Saville began a light and amusing recital of his various and singular life for the last three years. Anecdote, jest, maxim, remark, interspersed, gave a zest and piquancy to the narration. An accomplished *roué* always affects to moralize; it is a part of his character. There is a vague and shrewd sentiment that pervades his *morale* and his system. Frequent excitement, and its attendant relaxation; the conviction of the folly of all pursuits; the insipidity of all life; the hollowness of all love; the faithlessness in all ties; the

disbelief in all worth ; these consequences of a dissipated existence on a thoughtful mind, produce some remarkable, while they make so many wretched, characters. They coloured some of the most attractive prose among the French, and the most fascinating verse in the pages of Byron. It might be asked, by a profane inquirer (and I have touched on this before,) what effect a life nearly similar—a life of luxury, indolence, lassitude, profuse, but heartless love, imparted to the deep and touching wisdom in *his* page, whom we consider the wisest of men, and who has left us the most melancholy of doctrines ?

It was this turn of mind that made Saville's conversation peculiarly agreeable to Godolphin in his present humour ; and the latter invested it, from his own mood, with a charm which in reality it wanted. For, as I shall show, in Godolphin, what deterioration the habits of

aristocratic life produce on the mind of a man of genius, I show only in Saville, the effect they produce on a man of sense.

“Well, Godolphin,” said Saville, as he saw the former rise to depart; “you will at least dine with me to-day--a punctual eight. I think I can promise you an agreeable evening. The Linettini, and that dear little Fanny Millinger, (your old *flame*) are coming; and I have asked old Stracey, the poet, to say *bons-mots* for them. Poor old Stracey! He goes about to all his former friends and fellow-liberals, boasting of his favour with the Great, and does not see, that we only use him as we would a puppet-show or a dancing-dog.”

“What folly,” said Godolphin, “it is in any man of genius (not also of birth) to think the Great of this country can possibly esteem him. Nothing can equal the secret enmity with which our lazy Aristocracy regard and

intellect above their comprehension. Party Politics—and the tact, the shifting, the common-place that Party-politics alone require; these they *can* appreciate; and they feel respect for an orator — even though he be not a County member; for he can assist them in their paltry ambition for place and pension; but an author, or a man of science — the dull dogs positively jeer at him !”

“ And yet,” said Saville, “ how few men of letters perceive a truth so evident to us, so hackneyed even in the conversations of society. For a little reputation at a dinner-table, for a coaxing note from some titled demirep affecting the De Stael, they forget not only to be glorious, but even to be respectable. And this, too, not only for so petty a gratification, but for one that rarely lasts above a London season. We allow the low-born author to be the *lion* this year; but we dub him a *bore* the next. We

shut our doors upon his twice-told jests, and send for the Prague minstrels, to sing to us after dinner, instead."

"However," said Godolphin, "it is only poets you find so foolish as to be deceived by you. There is not a single prose writer, of real genius, so absurd."

"And why is that?"

"Because," replied Godolphin, philosophizing, "poets address themselves more to women than men; and insensibly they acquire the weaknesses which they are accustomed to address. A poet whose verses delight the women will be found, if we closely analyse his character, to be very like a woman himself."

"You don't love poets?" said Saville.

"The glory of old has departed from them. I mean less from their pages than their minds. We have plenty of beautiful poets, but how little poetry breathing of a great soul."

Here the door opened, and a Mr. Glosson was announced.—There entered a little, smirking, neat-dressed man—prim as a lawyer or a house-agent.

“ Ah, Glosson, is that you ?” said Saville, with something like animation : “ sit down, my good sir, sit down. Well ! well ! (rubbing his hands ;) what news ? what news ?”

“ Why, Mr. Saville, I think we may get the land from old N——. He has the right of the *job*. I have been with him all this morning. He asks six thousand pounds for it.”

“ The unconscionable dog !—He got it from the Crown for two.”

“ Ah, very true, very true : but you don't see, sir—you don't see—that it is well worth nine. Sad times—sad times : jobs from the Crown are growing scarcer every day, Mr. Saville.”

“ Humph ! that's all a chance—a specula-

tion. Times are bad, indeed, as you say: no money in the market: go, Glosson; offer him five; your per-centage shall be one per-cent higher than if I pay six thousand, and shall be counted up to the latter sum."

"He! he! he! sir!"—grinned Glosson:—"you are fond of your joke, Mr. Saville."

"Well now;—what else in the market?—never mind my friend:—Mr. Godolphin—Mr. Glosson;—now all *gêne* is over: proceed—proceed."

Glosson hummed, and bowed, and hummed again, and then glided on to speak of houses, and Crown lands, and properties in Wales, and places at Court; (for some of the subordinate posts at the Palace were then—perhaps are now—regular matter of barter:) and Saville, bending over the table, with his thin delicate hands clasped intently, and his brow denoting his interest, and his sharp shrewd eye fixed on

the agent, furnished to the contemplative Godolphin a picture which he did not fail to note, to moralize on, to despise !

What a spectacle is that of the prodigal rake, hardening and sharpening into the grasping speculator !

CHAPTER XX.

FANNY MILLINGER ONCE MORE.—LOVE.—WOMAN—
BOOKS.—A HUNDRED TOPICS TOUCHED ON THE SUR-
FACE.—GODOLPHIN'S STATE OF MIND MORE MI-
NUTELY EXAMINED.—THE DINNER AT SAVILLE'S.

GODOLPHIN went to see, and converse with, Fanny Millinger. She was still unmarried, and still the fashion. There was a sort of allegory of real life—like that which Goëthe would affect—in the manner in which, at certain epochs of his existence, our Idealist was brought into contact with the fair actress of ideal creations. There was, in short, something of a moral in the way these two streams of existence—the one belonging to the

actual, the other to the imaginary—flowed on, crossing each other at stated times. Which was the most really imaginative—the life of the stage, or that of the world's stage?

The gay Fanny was rejoiced to welcome back again her early lover. She ran on, talking of a thousand topics, without remarking the absent mind and musing eye of Godolphin, till he himself stopped her somewhat abruptly:—

“ Well, Fanny, well, and what do you know of Saville? You have grown intimate with him, eh? We shall meet at his house this evening.”

“ Oh yes, he is a charming person in his little way ; and the only man who allows me to be a friend without dreaming of becoming a lover. Now that's what I like. We poor actresses have so much would-be love in the course of our lives, that a little friendship now

and then is a novelty which other and soberer people can never enjoy. On reading ‘Gil Blas’ the other day—I am no great reader, as you may remember—I was struck by that part in which the dear Santillane assures us that there was never any love between him and Laura, the actress. I thought it so true to nature, — so probable — that they should have formed so strong an intimacy for each other—lived in the same house—had every opportunity for love—yet never loved. And it was exactly because she was an actress, and a light good-for-nothing creature, that it so happened; the very multiplicity of lovers prevented her falling in love: the very carelessness of her life, poor girl, rendered a friend so charming to her. It would have spoiled the friend to have made him an adorer: it would have turned the rarity into the every-day character. Now, so it is with me and Saville;—I like his wit—he likes

my good temper. We see each other as often as if we were in love ; and yet I do not believe it even possible that he should ever kiss my hand. After all," continued Fanny, laughing, " love is not so necessary to us women as people think. Fine writers say, ' oh, men have a thousand objects — women but one ! ' That's nonsense, dear Percy ; women have their thousand objects too. They have not the Bar, but they have the milliner's shop : they can't fight, but they can sit by the window and embroider a work-bag : they don't rush into politics, but they plunge their souls into love for a parrot or a lap-dog. Don't let men flatter themselves : Providence has been just as kind in that respect to one sex as to the other : our objects are small—yours great ; but a small object may occupy the mind just as much as the loftiest."

" Ours great ! psha ! " said Godolphin, who was rather struck with Fanny's remarks ;

“there is nothing great in those professions which man is pleased to extol. Is selfishness great? Is the low trickery, the organized lies, of the Bar, a great calling? Is the mechanical slavery of the soldier—fighting because he is in the way of fighting—without knowing the cause—without an object, save a dim, foolish vanity which he calls glory, and can't analyze—is that a great aim and vocation? Well: the senate! look at the outcry which wise men make against the loathsome corruption of that arena; then look at the dull hours, the tedious talk, the empty boasts, the poor and flat rewards, and tell me where is the greatness?—No, Fanny! the embroidered work-bag, and the petted parrot, afford just as great—morally great—occupations, as those of the Bar, the Army, the Senate. It is only the frivolous who talk of frivolities: there is nothing frivolous: all earthly occupations are on a par—alike

important if they alike occupy ; for, to the wise, all are poor and valueless.”

“ I fancy you are very wrong,” said the actress, pressing her pretty fingers to her forehead, as if to understand him ; “ but I cannot tell you why, and I never argue. I ramble on in my odd way, casting out my shrewd things without defending them, if any one chooses to quarrel with them. What I do, I let others do. My maxim in talk is my maxim in life. I claim liberty for myself, and give indulgence to others.”

“ I see,” said Godolphin, “ that you have plenty of books about you, though you plead *not guilty* to reading. Do you learn your philosophy from them ?—for I think you have contracted a vein of reflection, since we parted, which I scarcely recognize as an old characteristic.”

“ Why,” answered Fanny, “ though I don’t

read, I skim. Sometimes I canter through a dozen novels in a morning. I am disappointed, I confess, in all these works. I want to see more real knowledge of the world than they ever display. They tell us how Lord Arthur looked, and Lady Lucy dressed, and what was the colour of those curtains, and these eyes, and so forth: and then the better sort, perhaps, *do* also tell us what the heroine felt as well as wore; and try with might and main to pull some string of the internal machine; but still I am not enlightened—not touched. I don't recognize men and women: they are puppets, with holiday phrases: and I tell you what, Percy, these novelists make the last mistake you would suppose them guilty of;—they have not *romance* enough in them to paint the truths of society. Old gentlemen say novels are bad teachers of life because they make it too ideal: quite the reverse: novels are too

trite!—too superficial! their very talk about love, and the fuss they make about it, show how shallow real romance is with them—for they say nothing new on it, and real romance is for ever striking out new thoughts. Am I not right, Percy?—No! life—be it worldly as it may—has a vast deal of romance in it. Every one of us (even poor I) have a mine of thoughts, and fancies, and wishes, that books are too dull and commonplace to reach: the heart is a romance in itself.”

“ A philosophical romance, my Fanny, full of mysteries, and conceits, and refinements, mixed up with its deeper passages. But how came you so wise?”

“ Thank you!” answered Fanny, with a profound courtesy. “ The fact is—though you, as in duty bound, don’t perceive it—that I am older than I was when we last met. I reflect where I then felt. Besides,

the stage fills our heads with a half sort of wisdom, and gives us that strange *mélange* of shrewd experience and romantic notions which is, in fact, the real representation of nine human hearts out of ten. Talking of books, and my dear Gil Blas, I want some one to write a novel, which shall be a metaphysical Gil Blas; which shall deal more with the mind than Le Sage's book, and less with the actions; which shall make its hero the creature of the world, but a different creation, though equally true; which shall give a faithful picture, in the character of one man, of the aspect and the effects of our social system; making that man of a better sort of clay than the amusing lacquey was, and the product of a more artificial grade of society. The book I mean would be a sadder one than Le Sage's, but equally faithful to life."

“ And it would have more of romance, if I rightly understand what you mean ?”

“ Precisely : romance of idea as well as incident—natural romance. By the way, how few know what natural romance is : so that you feel the ideas in a book or play are true and faithful to the characters they are ascribed to, why mind whether the incidents are probable ? Yet common readers only go by the incidents ; as if the incidents, in three-fourths of Shakspeare’s plays, were even ordinarily possible ! But people have so little nature in them, that they don’t know what *is* natural !”

Thus Fanny ran on, in no very connected manner ; stringing together those remarks which, unless I am mistaken, show how much better an uneducated, clever girl, whose very nature is a quick perception of art, can play the critic, than the pedants who assume the office.

But it was only for the moment that the heavy heart of Godolphin could forget its load. It was in vain that he sought to be amused, while yet smarting under the freshness of regret. A great shock had been given to his nature; he had loved against his will; and as we have seen, on his return to the Priory, he had even resolved on curing himself of a passion so unprofitable and unwise. But the jealousy of a night had shivered into dust a prudence, which never of right belonged to a very ardent and generous nature: that jealousy was soothed, allayed; but how fierce, how stunning, was the blow that succeeded it! Constance had confessed love, and yet had refused him—for ever! Clear and noble as, to herself, her motives might seem in that refusal, it was impossible that they should appear in the same light to Godolphin. Unable to penetrate into the effect which her father's death-

bed, and her own oath, had produced on the mind of Constance; how indissolubly that remembrance had united itself with all her schemes and prospects for the future; how marvellously, yet how naturally, it had converted worldly ambition into a sacred duty;—unable, I say, to comprehend all these various, and powerful, and governing motives, Godolphin beheld in her refusal only the aversion to share his slender income, and the desire for loftier station. He considered, therefore, that sorrow was a tribute to her unworthy of himself; he deemed it a part of his dignity, to strive to forget. That balmy and hallowed sentiment which, in some losses of the heart, makes it a duty to remember, and preaches a soothing and soft lesson from the very text of regret, was not for the wrung and stricken soul of Godolphin. He only strove to dissipate his grief, and shut out from his mental sight

the charmed vision of the first, the only woman he had deeply loved.

Godolphin felt too, that the sole impulse which could have united the fast-expiring energy and enterprize of his youth to the ambition of life was for ever gone. With Constance—with the proud thoughts that belonged to her—the aspirings after earthly honours were linked, and with her were broken. He felt his old philosophy—the love of ease, the profound contempt for fame,—close, like the deep waters over those glittering hosts for whose passage they had been severed for a moment—whelming the crested and gorgeous visions for ever beneath the wave! Conscious of his talents—nay, swayed to and fro by the unquiet stirrings of no common genius—Godolphin yet foresaw that he was not henceforth destined to play a shining part in the crowded drama of life. His career was already closed: he might be contented

—prosperous—happy; but never great. He had seen enough of authors, and of the thorns that beset the paths of literature, to experience none of those delusions which cheat the blinded aspirer into the wilderness of publication—that mode of obtaining fame and hatred to which those who feel unfitted for more bustling concerns are impelled. Write he might: and he was fond, (as disappointment increased his propensities to dreaming,) of brightening his solitude with the golden palaces and winged shapes that lie glassed within the fancy—the soul's fairy-land. But the vision with him was only evoked one hour to be destroyed the next. Happy had it been for Godolphin, and not unfortunate perhaps for the world, had he learned at that exact moment the true motive for human action which he afterwards, and too late, discovered. Happy had it been for him to have learned that there is an ambition to *do*

good—an ambition to raise the wretched as well as to rise.

Alas!—either in letters or in politics, how utterly poor, barren, and untempting, is every path that points upward to the mockery of public eminence, when looked upon by a soul that has any real elements of wise or noble; unless we have an impulse within, which mortification chills not—a reward without, which selfish defeat does not destroy.

But, unblest by one friend really wise or good, spoilt by the world, soured by disappointment, Godolphin's very faculties made him inert, and his very wisdom taught him to be useless. Again and again,—as the spider in some cell where no winged insect ever wanders, builds and rebuilds its mesh,—the scheming heart of the Idealist was doomed to weave net after net for those visions of the Lovely and the Perfect which never can descend to the gloomy regions

wherein mortality is cast. The most common disease to genius is nympholepsy—the saddening for a spirit that the world knows not. Ah! how those outward disappointments which should cure, only feed the disease!

The dinner at Saville's was gay and lively, as such entertainments with such participators usually are. If nothing in the world is more heavy than your formal banquet,—nothing, on the other hand, is more agreeable than those well-chosen *laissez aller* feasts at which the guests are as happily selected as the wines; where there is no form, no reserve, no effort; and people, having met to sit still for a few hours, are willing to be as pleasant to each other as if they were never to meet again. Yet the conversation in all companies not literary turns upon persons rather than things; and your wits learn their art only in the School for Scandal.

“ Only think, Fanny,” said Saville, “ of Clavers turning beau in his old age. He commenced with being a jockey ; then he became an electioneerer ; then a methodist parson ; then a builder of houses ; and now he has dashed suddenly up to London, rushed into the clubs, mounted a wig, studied an ogle, and walks about the Opera-House swinging a cane, and, at the age of fifty-six, punching young minors in the side, and saying tremulously, ‘ We young fellows ! ’ ”

“ He hires pages to come to him in the park with three-cornered notes,” said Fanny : “ he opens each with affected *nonchalance* ; looks full at the bearer ; and cries aloud—‘ Tell your mistress I cannot refuse her : ’—then canters off, with the air of a man persecuted *à la mort !* ”

“ But did you see what an immense pair of whiskers Chester has mounted ? ”

“ Yes,” answered a Mr. De Lacy ; “ A——

says he has cultivated them in order to 'plant out' his ugliness."

"Ha! ha! just hear De Lacy. He is so ashamed of saying a good thing, that he always fathers his own *bons mots* upon A——. A—— is, in reality, the stupidest dog in the world; and De Lacy has gone wickedly about setting him up for a wit. Poor A—— is quite annoyed by it. He can't open his silly mouth but what every body stops eating to gape at him, and catch the 'folly as it flies.'"

"De man is ver *bête*," said the Linettini gently: "but vy *you* no talk, Monsieur de Dauphin?" turning to Percy; "you ver silent."

"Unhappily, I have been so long out of town, that these anecdotes of the day are *caviare* to me."

"But so," cried Saville, "would a volume of French Memoirs be to any one that took it

up for the first time ; yet the French Memoirs amuse one exactly as much as if one had lived with the persons written of. Now, that ought to be the case with conversations upon persons. I flatter myself, Fanny, that you and I hit off characters so well by a word or two, that no one who hears us wants to know any thing more about them."

" I believe you," said Godolphin, " and that is the reason you never talk of yourselves."

" Bah ! Apropos of egoists, did you meet George Barabel in Rome ?"

" Yes, writing his travels. ' Pray,' said he to me, (seizing me by the button) in the Coliseum, ' what do you think is the highest order of literary composition ?' ' Why, an epic, I fancy,' said I ; ' or perhaps a tragedy, or a great history, or a novel like *Don Quixote*.' ' Pooh !' quoth Barabel, looking important, ' there's nothing so high in literature as a good

book of travels ;' then, sinking his voice into a whisper, and laying his finger wisely on his nose, he hissed out, ' I have a quarto, Sir, in the press ! ' ”

“ Ha ! ha ! ” laughed Stracey, the old wit, picking his teeth, and speaking for the first time, “ if you tell Barabel you have seen a handsome woman, he says, mysteriously frowning, ‘ Handsome, Sir ! has she *travelled* ? answer me that ! ’ ”

“ But have you seen Paulton’s new equipage ? Brown carriage, brown liveries, brown harness, brown horses, while Paulton and his wife sit within dressed in brown, *cap-à-pie*. The best of it is that Paulton went to his coachmaker, to order his carriage, saying, ‘ Mr. Houlditch, I am growing old,—too old to be eccentric any longer ; I must have something remarkably plain ; ’ and to this hour Paulton goes *brown-ing* about the town, crying

out to every one, ‘Nothing like simplicity, believe me.’”

“He discharged his coachman for wearing white gloves instead of brown,” said Stracey. “‘What do you mean, sir,’ cried he, ‘with your damned showy vulgarities?—don’t you see me toiling my soul out to be plain and quiet, and you must spoil all, by not being *brown* enough!’”

“Ah, Godolphin, you seem pensive,” whispered Fanny; “yet we are tolerably amusing, too.”

“My dear Fanny,” answered Godolphin, rousing himself, “the dialogue is gay, the actors know their parts, the lights are brilliant; but—the scene—the scene cannot shift for me! Call it what you will, I am not deceived. I see the paint and the canvass, but—and yet, away these thoughts! Shall I fill your glass, Fanny?”

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EVENT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS IN THIS HISTORY.—GODOLPHIN A SECOND TIME LEAVES ENGLAND.

GODOLPHIN was welcomed with enthusiasm by the London world. His graces, his manners, his genius, his *bon ton*, and his *bonnes fortunes*, were the theme of every society. Verses imputed to him, — some erroneously, some truly, — were mysteriously circulated from hand to hand; and every one envied the fair inspirers to whom they were supposed to be addressed.

It is not my intention to reiterate the wearisome echo of novelists, who descant on fashion, and term it life. No description of rose-coloured curtains and buhl cabinets, no miniature paintings of boudoirs and salons, no recital of conventional insipidities, interlarded with affected criticisms, and honoured by the name of dramatic dialogue, shall lend their fascination to these pages. Far other and far deeper aims are mine in stooping to delineate the customs and springs of aristocratic life. The reader must give himself wholly up to me; he must prepare to go with me through the grave as through the gay, and unresistingly to thread the dark and subtle interest which alone I can impart to these memoirs, or—let him close the book at once. I promise him novelty; but it is not, when duly scanned, a novelty of a light and frivolous cast.

But throughout that routine of dissipation

in which he chased the phantom Forgetfulness, Godolphin sighed for the time he had fixed on for leaving the scenes in which it was pursued. Of Constance's present existence, he heard nothing; of her former triumphs and conquests he heard everywhere. And when did he ever meet one face, however fair, which could awaken a single thought of admiration, while her's was yet all faithfully glassed in his remembrance? I know nothing that so utterly converts society into "the gallery of pictures," as the recollection of one loved and lost. That recollection has but two cures; Time and the Hermitage. Foreigners impute to us the turn for sentiment; alas! there are no people who have it less. We seek for ever after amusement; and there is not one popular prose book in our language, in which the more tender and yearning secrets of the heart form the subject matter. The "Corinne" and the

“Julie” weary us, or we turn them into sorry jests!

One evening, a little before his departure from England—that a lingering and vague hope of which Constance was the object, had considerably protracted beyond the allotted time, Godolphin was at a house in which the hostess was a relation to Lord Erpingham.

“Have you heard,” asked Lady G——, “that my cousin Erpingham is to be married?”

“No, indeed; to whom?” said Godolphin, eagerly.

“To Miss Vernon.”

Sudden as was the shock, Godolphin heard, and changed neither hue nor muscle.

“Are you certain of this?” asked a lady present.

“Quite: Lady Erpingham is my authority; I received the news from herself this very day.”

“And does she seem pleased with the match?”

“Why, I can scarcely say, for the letter contradicts itself in every passage. Now, she congratulates herself on having so charming a daughter-in-law; now, she suddenly stops short to observe what a pity it is that young men should be so precipitate! Now, she says what a great match it will be for her dear ward! and now, what a happy one it will be for Erpingham! In short, she does not know whether to be pleased or vexed: and that, *pour dire vrai*, is my case also.”

“Why, indeed,” observed the former speaker, “Miss Vernon has played her cards well. Lord Erpingham would have been a great match in himself, with his person and reputation. Ah! she was always an ambitious girl.”

“And a proud one,” said Lady G——; “well, I suppose Erpingham House will be the rendezvous to all the Blues, and wits, and

savans. Miss Vernon is another *Aspasia*, I hear."

"I hate girls who are so designing," said the lady who spoke before, and had only one daughter, very ugly, who, at the age of thirty-five, was about to accept her first offer, and marry a younger son in the Guards; "I think she's rather vulgar; for my part, I doubt if—I shall patronize her."

"Well, what do *you* think of it, Mr. Godolphin?—you have seen Miss Vernon?"

Godolphin was gone.

It was about ten days after this conversation that Godolphin, waiting at a Hotel in Dover, the hour at which the packet set sail for Calais, took up the "Morning Post;" and the first passage that met his eye, was the one which I transcribe:—

"*Marriage in High Life*.—On Thursday last, at Wendover Castle, the Earl of Erpingham to Constance, only daughter of the cele-

brated Mr. Vernon. The bride was dressed, &c.—” and then followed the trite, yet pompous pageantry of words—the sounding nothings—with which ladies who become Countesses are knelled into marriage.

“The dream is over!” said Godolphin, mournfully, as the paper fell to the ground; and, burying his face within his hands, he remained motionless till they came to announce the moment of departure.

And thus Percy Godolphin left, for the second time, his native shores. When we return to him, what changes will the feelings, now awakened within him, have worked in his character! The drops that trickle within the cavern harden, yet brighten into spars as they indurate. Nothing is more polished, nothing more cold, than that wisdom which is the work of former tears, of former passions, and is formed within a musing and solitary mind!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BRIDE ALONE.—A DIALOGUE POLITICAL AND MATRIMONIAL.—CONSTANCE'S GENIUS FOR DIPLOMACY.—THE CHARACTER OF HER ASSEMBLIES.—HER CONQUEST OVER LADY DELVILLE.

“BRING me that book; place that table nearer; and leave me.”

The abigail obeyed the orders, and the young Countess of Erpingham was alone.—Alone! what a word for a young and beautiful bride in the first months of her marriage! Alone, and in the heart of that mighty city in which rank and wealth—and they were her's—are the idols all worship, all throng around.

It was a room fancifully and splendidly decorated. Flowers and perfumes were, however, its chief luxury; and from the open window you might see the trees in the old mall deepening into the rich verdure of June. That haunt, too—a classical haunt for London—was at the hour I speak of full of gay and idle life; and there was something fresh and joyous in the air, the sun, and the crowd of foot and horse that swept below.

Was the glory gone from your brow, Constance?—or the proud gladness from your eye? Alas! are not the blessings of the world like the enchanted bullets?—that which pierces our heart is united with the gift which our heart desired!

Lord Erpingham entered the room.—“Well, Constance,” said he, “shall you ride on horseback to-day?”

“I think not.”

“ Then I wish you would call on Lady Delville.—You see, Delville is of my party : we sit together. You should be very civil to her, and I did not think you were so the other night.”

“ You wish Lady Delville to support your political interest ; and, if I mistake not, you think her at present lukewarm.”

“ Precisely.”

“ Then, my dear lord, will you place confidence in my discretion ? I promise you, if you will leave me undisturbed in my own plans, that Lady Delville shall be the most devoted of your party before the season is half over : but then, the means will not be those you advise.”

“ Why, I advised none.”

“ Yes—civility ;—a very poor policy—”

“ D——n it, Constance ! why you would not *frown* a great person like Lady Delville into affection for us.”

“ Leave it to me.”

“ Nonsense !”

“ My dear lord, only try. Three months is all I ask. You will leave the management of politics to me ever afterwards! I was born a schemer. Am I not John Vernon’s daughter?”

“ Well, well, do as you will !” said Lord Erpingham :—“ But I see how it will end.— However, you will call on Lady Delville to-day?”

“ If you wish it, certainly.”

“ I do.”

Lady Delville was a proud, great lady; not very much liked, and not so often invited by her equals as if she had been agreeable and a flirt.

Constance knew with whom she had to treat. She called on Lady Delville that day. Lady Delville was at home: a pretty and popular Mrs. Trevor was with her.

Lady Delville received her coolly — Constance was haughtiness itself.

“ You go to the Duchess of Daubigny’s to-night,” said Lady Delville, in the course of their broken conversation.

“ Indeed I do not. I like agreeable society. It shall be my object to form a circle that not one displeasing person shall obtain access to. Will you assist me, my dear Mrs. Trevor ?” — and Constance turned, with her softest smile, to the lady she addressed.

Mrs. Trevor was flattered: Lady Delville drew herself up.

“ It is a small party at the Duchess’s,” said the latter; “ merely to meet the Duke and Duchess of C——.”

“ Ah! few people are capable of giving a suitable entertainment to the royal family.”

“ But surely none more so than the Duchess of Daubigny:—her house so large, her rank so great.”

“ These are but poor ingredients towards the forming of an agreeable party,” said Constance coldly. “ The mistake made by common minds is, to suppose titles the only rank. Royal dukes love, above all other persons, to be amused ; and amusement is the last thing generally provided for them.”

The conversation fell into other channels. Constance rose to depart. She warmly pressed the hand of Mrs. Trevor, whom she had only seen once before.

“ A few persons come to me to-morrow evening,” said she ; “ *do* waive ceremony, and join us. I can promise you that not one disagreeable person shall be present ; and that the Duchess of Daubigny shall write for an invitation, and be refused.”

Mrs. Trevor accepted the invitation.

Lady Delville was enraged beyond measure. Never was female tongue more bitter than

her's at the expense of that insolent Lady Erpingham! Yet Lady Delville was secretly in grief; for the first time in her life, she was hurt at not having been asked to a party: and being hurt because she was not going, she longed most eagerly to go.

The next evening came. Erpingham House was not large, but it was well adapted for the description of assembly its beautiful owner had invited. Statues, busts, pictures, books, scattered or arranged about the apartments, furnished matter for intellectual conversation, or gave at least an intellectual air to the meeting.

About a hundred persons were present. They were culled from the most distinguished ornaments of the time. Musicians, painters, authors, orators, fine gentlemen, dukes, princes, and beauties. One thing, however, was imperatively necessary in order to admit them

—the profession of liberal opinions. No Tory, however wise, eloquent, or beautiful, could have obtained the *sesame* to those apartments.

Constance never seemed more lovely, and never before was she so winning. The coldness and the arrogance of her manner were wholly vanished. To every one she spoke; and to every one her voice, her manner, were kind, cordial, familiar; but familiar with a soft dignity, that heightened the charm. Ambitious not only to please but to dazzle, she breathed into her conversation all the grace and culture of her mind. They who admired her the most, were the most accomplished themselves. Now exchanging with foreign nobles that brilliant trifling of the world in which there is often so much penetration, wisdom, and research into character; now with a kindling eye and animated cheek, commenting with poets and critics, on literature and the

arts; now, in a more remote and quiet corner, seriously discussing, with hoary politicians, those affairs in which even they allowed her shrewdness and her grasp of intellect; and combining with every grace and every accomplishment, a rare and dazzling order of beauty — we may readily imagine the sensation she created, and the sudden and novel zest which so splendid an Armida must have given to the tameness of society.

The whole of the next week, the party at Erpingham House was the theme of every conversation. Each person who had been there, had met the *lion* he had been most anxious to see. The beauty had conversed with the poet, who had charmed her; the young *debutant* in science had paid homage to the great professor of its loftiest mysteries; the statesman had thanked the author who had defended his measures; the author had been

delighted with the compliment of the statesman. Every one then agreed that, while the highest rank in the kingdom had been there, rank had been the least attraction; and those who before had found Constance repellent, were the very persons who now expatiated with the greatest rapture on the sweetness of her manners. Then, too, every one who had been admitted to the *coterie*, dwelt on the *rarity* of the admission; and thus, all the world were dying for an introduction to Erpingham House—partly because it was agreeable—principally, because it was difficult.

It soon became a compliment to the understanding to say of a person, “He goes to Lady Erpingham’s!” They who valued themselves on their understandings moved Heaven and earth to become popular with the beautiful Countess. Lady Delville was not asked; Lady Delville was furious: she affected dis-

dain, but no one gave her credit for it. Lord Erpingham teased Constance on this point.

“ You see I was right ; for you have affronted Lady Delville. She has made Delville look coolly on me ; in a few weeks he will be a Tory : think of that, Lady Erpingham !”

“ One month more,” answered Constance, with a smile, “ and you shall see.”

One night, Lady Delville and Lady Erpingham met at a large party. The latter seated herself by her haughty enemy : not seeming to heed her coolness, Constance entered into conversation with her. She dwelt upon books, pictures, music : her manner was animated, and her wit playful. Pleased, in spite of herself, Lady Delville warmed from her reserve.

“ My dear Lady Delville,” said Constance, suddenly turning her bright countenance on the Whig Countess with an expression of delighted surprise ; “ will you forgive me?—I

never dreamt before that you were so charming a person ! I never conceal my sentiments ; and I own with regret and shame that, till this moment, I had never seen in your mind—whatever I might in your person—those claims to admiration which were constantly dinned into my ear.”

Lady Delville actually coloured.

“ Pray,” continued Constance, “ condescend to permit me to a nearer acquaintance. Will you dine with us on Thursday ?—we shall have only nine persons besides yourself : but they are the nine persons whom I most esteem and admire.”

Lady Delville accepted the invitation. From that hour, Lady Delville — who had at first resented, from the deepest recess of her heart, Constance Vernon’s accession to rank and wealth—who, had Constance deferred to her early acquaintance, would have always found

something in her she could have affected to despise; — from that hour, Lady Delville was the warmest advocate, and, a little time after, the sincerest follower of the youthful Countess.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN INSIGHT INTO THE REAL *Grand Monde* :—BEING A SEARCH BEHIND THE ROSE-COLOURED CURTAINS—THE COMMENCEMENT OF A CERTAIN INSTITUTION.

THE time we now speak of was the most brilliant the English world, during the last half century, has known. Lord Byron was in his brief and dazzling zenith : De Stael was in London : the Peace had turned the attention of rich idlers to social enjoyment and to letters. There was an excitement, and a brilliancy, and a *spirituality*, about our circles, which we do not recognise now. Never had a young and ambitious woman—a beauty and a genius

— a finer moment for the commencement of her power. It was Constance's early and bold resolution to push to the utmost—even to exaggeration—a power existing in all polished states, but now mostly in this,—the power of Fashion! This mysterious and subtle engine she was eminently skilled to move according to her will. Her intuitive penetration into character, her tact, and her grace, were exactly the talents Fashion most demands; and they were at present devoted only to that sphere. The rudeness that she mingled, at times, with the bewitching softness and ease of manner she could command at others, increased the effect of her power. It is much to intimidate as well as to win. And her rudeness in a very little while grew popular; for it was never exercised but on those whom the world loves to see humbled. Modest merit in any rank; and even insolence, if accompanied with merit, were

always safe from her satire. It was the *hauteur* of foolish duchesses or purse-proud *roturiers* that she loved, and scrupled not, to abase.

And the independence of her character was mixed with extraordinary sweetness of temper. Constance could not be in a passion: it was out of her nature. If she was stung, she could utter a sarcasm; but she could not frown, or exalt her voice. There was that magic in her, that she was always feminine. She did not stare young men out of countenance; she never addressed them by their christian names; she never flirted—never coquetted: the bloom and flush of modesty was yet all virgin upon her youth. She, the founder of a new dynasty, avoided what her successors and contemporaries have deemed it necessary to incur. She was the leader of fashion; but—it is a miraculous union—she was respectable!

At this period, some new dances were

brought into England. These dances found much favour in the eyes of several great ladies young enough to dance them. They met at each other's houses in the morning, to practise the steps. Among these was Lady Erpingham ; her house became the favourite rendezvous.

What singular anecdotes may be referred to that day ! Lord Byron was wooing Lady — who was one of the *coterie* ; and he used sometimes to attend these rehearsals, for the purpose of meeting her. One day he said to her,

“ My God ! can you love this wretched amusement ? ”

“ Nay, why not learn to dance yourself, and shame the vulgar, who fancy you can never be gay ? ”

“ I dance ! ” he said, turning white with suppressed rage, and glancing to the fatal foot—“ I dance ! I—whom God cursed with deformity—*I!* ”

The poor lady was awed from the practice from that hour.

The young Marquis of Dartington was one of the little knot. Celebrated for his great fortune, his personal beauty, and his general success, he resolved to fall in love with Lady Erpingham. He devoted himself exclusively to her; he joined her in the morning in her rides—in the evening in her gaieties. He had fallen in love with her?—yes!—did he love her?—not the least. But he was excessively idle! what else could he do?

The humorous and shrewd author of “Sayings and Doings” has contended for the good morals of our Aristocracy. My dear Mr. Hook, it is out of the nature of things. An Aristocracy must always be immoral, so far as the sexes are concerned, because it must always be idle. It is only when people are unemployed, that they run much after their neighbours’ wives.

Constance early saw the attentions and designs of Lord Dartington. There is one difficulty in repressing advances in great society—one so easily becomes ridiculous by being a prude. But Constance dismissed Lord Dartington with great dexterity. This was the occasion :—

One of the apartments in Erpingham House communicated with a conservatory. In this conservatory Constance was alone one morning, when Lord Dartington, who had entered the house with Lord Erpingham, joined her. He was not a man who could ever become sentimental ; he was rather the *gay lover*—rather the *Don Gaolor* than the *Amadis* ; but he was a little abashed before Constance. He trusted, however, to his fine eyes and his good complexion—plucked up courage ; and, picking a flower from the same plant Constance was tending, said,—

“ I believe there is a custom in some part of

the world to express love by flowers. May I, dear Lady Erpingham, trust to this flower to express what I dare not utter?"

Constance did not blush, nor look confused, as Lord Dartington had hoped and expected. One who had been loved by Godolphin was not likely to feel much agitation at the gallantry of Lord Dartington; but she looked gravely in his face, paused a little before she answered, and then said, with a smile that abashed the suitor more than severity could possibly have done:—

“My dear Lord Dartington, do not let us mistake each other. I live in the world like other women—but I am not altogether like them. Not another word of gallantry to me alone, as you value my friendship. In a crowded room, pay me as many compliments as you like. It will flatter my vanity to have you in my train. And now, just do me the favour to take these scissors, and cut the dead leaves off that plant.”

Lord Dartington, to use a common phrase, “hummed and hawed.” He looked, too, a little angry. An artful and shrewd politician, it was not Constance’s wish to cool the devotion, though she might the attachment, of a single member of her husband’s party. With a kind look—but a look so superior, so queen-like, so free from the petty and coquettish condescension of the sex, that the gay lord wondered from that hour how he could ever have dreamt of Constance as of other ladies of rank (*id est*, of pleasure,)—she stretched her hand to him.

“We are friends, Lord Dartington?—and now we know each other, we shall be so always.”

Lord Dartington bowed confusedly over the beautiful hand he touched; and Constance, walking into the drawing-room, sent for Lord Erpingham on business—Dartington took his leave.

The next day was memorable for the origin of a singular institution.

It was after practising the dances we have referred to, that Lady —— started the idea of reviving a certain club, and giving balls weekly, to be under the patronage of certain persons, who should have the privilege of inviting the guests.

“ We will make the price of admission low,” cried Lady ——, and keep out the *roturiers*. There shall be no ostentation of wealth, no suppers. It will be every thing if these entertainments, being perfectly distinct from those of rich bankers, rich bankers cannot affect to vie with us.”

“ At the same time,” said Constance, “ we will set up a rank independent of titular rank. We will not be dictated to by *Mesdames les Duchesses*; we will refuse admission to great persons as well as to wealthy ones.”

“In a short time,” cried the Countess of ——, who had an amazing number of Scotch cousins unprovided for, and had no influence with Government, “in a short time we shall be able to make only those whom we admit *the fashion*: in a short time, too, only we,—our relations and our friends,—will be the fashion.”

“We shall create,” said Constance, “an entire but quiet revolution in our *petit grand monde*.”

And this was the origin of ——.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PECULIAR CONDITION OF WOMEN IN THE HIGHER RANKS.—THE MARRIED STATE OF CONSTANCE.

WHO does not recollect when the institution we refer to was commenced? Who does not recollect the ills that beset the infant state? But it outgrew them rapidly: in a season it was more the rage, perhaps, than it has been since, certainly than it is now.

I hate vulgar scandal. I am not going to write books against Lady this or Lady that: I shall not, therefore, give any names to the Patronesses, nor say whether Constance was

one of them. Perhaps, while enjoying the power of a Patroness, it is more consistent with the character of our female Castruccio to suppose that she avoided the odium.

However, every month, every day, the influence of the young Countess grew more extensive. Her house, from the political character she gave to it, obtained for its gaieties a more solid and important reputation than if it had been merely celebrated for the elegance and grace of its entertainments. In her *salons* the measures of her party were discussed: in her *boudoir* (it was whispered that) they were arranged. That party,—disliked by the Church, feared by the more powerful of the aristocracy, and despised at that time (because mistrusted) by the people,—that party were yet supported by her wise address, and increased by her secret power. Even this new institution,—seemingly intended only for young gentlemen and ladies

who were fond of bread-and-butter and quadrilles,—was made an organ of political influence. A liberal cast was given to it: Liberals were seldom refused admission to it: day by day it became more and more the fashion to be liberal. These are facts; and they are of an order of facts that influence the fate of nations; yet History would overlook them. Poor History! that pretends to express so much truth, and grasps only the more enormous of fictions.

Constance, Countess of Erpingham, was young, rich, lovely as a dream, worshipped as a goddess. Was she happy? and was her whole heart occupied in the trifles that surrounded her?

Deep within her memory was buried one fatal image, that she could not exorcise. The reproaching and mournful countenance of Godolphin rose before her at all times and seasons. The charm of his presence no other human

being could renew. His eloquent and noble features, living and glorious with genius and with passion, his sweet deep voice, his converse, so rich with mind and imagination, and the subtle delicacy with which he applied its graces to some sentiment dedicated to her; (delicious flattery, of all flatteries the most attractive to a sensitive and intellectual woman!)—these occurred to her again and again, and rendered all she saw around her flat, wearisome, insipid. Nor was this deep-seated and tender-weakness the only serpent—if I may use so confused a metaphor—in the roses of her lot.

And here I invoke the reader's graver attention. The fate of women in all the more polished circles of society is eminently unnatural and unhappy. The peasant and his dame are on terms of equality—equality even of ambition: no career is open to one and shut to the other;—equality even of hardship, and hardship is

employment: no labour occupies the whole energies of the man, but leaves those of the woman unemployed. Is this the case with the wives in a higher station?—the wives of the lawyer, the merchant, the senator, the noble? There, the men have their occupations; and the women (unless, like poor Fanny, work-bags and parrots can employ them) none. They are idle. They employ the imagination and the heart. They fall in love and are wretched; or they remain virtuous, and are either wearied by an eternal monotony, or they fritter away intellect, mind, character, in the minutest frivolities—frivolities being their only refuge from stagnation. Yes! there is one very curious curse for the sex which men don't consider! Once married, the more aspiring of them have no real scope for ambition: the ambition gnaws away their content, and never finds elsewhere wherewithal to feed on.

This was Constance's especial misfortune. Her lofty, and restless, and soaring spirit pined for a sphere of action, and ball-rooms and boudoirs met it on every side. One hope she did indeed cherish : that hope was the source of her intrigues and schemes, of her care for seeming trifles, the waste of her energies on seeming frivolities. This hope—this object—was, to diminish, to crush, the overweening power of that order to which she belonged herself; which she had entered only to humble; and which, admitted now to its most secret springs, she loathed more than ever for its hollowness—despised for its self-worshipping conceit—and detested for the withering and dark influence which she conceived (perhaps erroneously) it exercised on the lowlier classes of society. But this hope was a distant and chill vision. She was too rational to anticipate an early and effectual improvement in our social state, and

too rich in the treasures of mind to be the creature of one idea. Satiety—the common curse of the great—crept over her day by day. The great powers within her lay stagnant—the keen intellect rusted in its sheath.

“How is it,” said she, to the beautiful Countess of C——, “that you seem always so gay and so animated; that with all your vivacity and tenderness, you are never at a loss for occupation? You never seem weary—*ennuyée*—why is this?”

“I will tell you,” said the pretty Countess, archly; “I change my lovers every month.” Constance blushed, and asked no more.

Many women in her state, influenced by an almost universal example, wearied by a life in which the heart had no share; without children, without a guide; assailed and wooed on all sides, in all shapes;—many women would have ventured, if not on a *grande pas-*

sion, at least on a *petit caprice* ! But Constance remained as bright and cold as ever—“ the unsunned snow ! ” It might be, indeed, that the memory of Godolphin preserved her safe from all lesser dangers. The asbestos once conquered by fire, can never be consumed by it ; but there was also another cause in Constance’s very nature—it was pride !

Oh, God ! if men could but dream of what a proud woman endures in those caresses which humble her, they would not wonder why proud women are so difficult to subdue. This is a matter on which we all ponder much, but we dare not write honestly upon it. But imagine a young, haughty, guileless beauty, married to a man whom she neither loves nor honours ; and so far from that want of love rendering her likely to fall hereafter, it is more probable to make her recoil from the very name of love !

About this time the Dowager Lady Erpingham died; an event sincerely mourned by Constance, and which broke the strongest tie that united the young Countess to her lord. Lord Erpingham and Constance, indeed, now saw but little of each other. Like most men six feet high, with large black whiskers, he was vain of his person; and, like most rich noblemen, he found plenty of ladies who assured him he was irresistible. He had soon grown angry at the unadmiring and calm urbanity of Constance; and, living a great deal with single men, he formed *liaisons* of the same order they do—an order which easily induces *Monsieur* to forget *Madame* at home. He was, however, sensible that he had been fortunate in the choice of a wife. His political importance the wisdom of Constance had quadrupled, at the least; his house she had rendered the most brilliant in London, and his

name the most courted in the lists of the Peerage. Though munificent, she was not extravagant; though a beauty, she did not intrigue; neither, though his inconstancy was open, did she appear jealous; nor, whatever the errors of his conduct, did she ever disregard his interest, disobey his wishes, or waver from the smooth and continuous sweetness of her temper. Of such a wife, Lord Erpingham could not complain: he esteemed her, praised her, asked her advice, and stood a little in awe of her.

Ah, Constance! had you been the daughter of a noble or a peasant—had you been the daughter of any man but John Vernon—what a treasure beyond price, without parallel, would that heart, that beauty, that genius have been!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PLEASURE OF RETALIATING HUMILIATION.—CONSTANCE'S DEFENCE OF FASHION.—REMARKS ON FASHION.—GODOLPHIN'S WHEREABOUT.—FANNY MILLINGER'S CHARACTER OF HERSELF.—WANT OF COURAGE IN MORALISTS.

IT was a proud moment for Constance, when the Duchess of Winstoun and Lady Margaret Midgecombe wrote to her, worried her, beset her, for a smile, a courtesy, an invitation, or a ticket to Almack's.

They had at first thought to cry her down; to declare that she was plebeian, mad, *bizarre*, and a blue. It was all in vain. Constance rose every hour. They struggled against the

conviction, but it would not do. The first person who confounded them with the sense of their error was the late King, then Regent; he devoted himself to Lady Erpingham for a whole evening, at a ball given by himself. From that hour they were assured they had been wrong: they accordingly called on her the next day. Constance received them with the same coldness she had always evinced; but they went away declaring they never saw any one whose manners were so improved. They then sent her an invitation! she refused it; a second! she refused; a third, begging her to fix the day!!! she fixed the day, and disappointed them. Lord bless us! how sorry they were; how alarmed; how terrified! their dear Lady Erpingham must be ill! they sent every day for the next week to know how she was!

“Why,” said Mrs. Trevor to Lady Erping-

ham, "why do you continue so cruel to these poor people? I know they were very impertinent, and so forth, once; but it is surely wiser and more dignified, now, to forgive; to appear unconscious of the past: people of the world ought not to quarrel with each other."

"You are right, and yet you are mistaken," said Constance: "I do forgive, and I don't quarrel; but my opinion, my contempt, remain the same, or are rather more disdainful than ever. These people are not worth losing the luxury we all experience in expressing contempt. I continue, therefore, but quietly and without affectation, to indulge that luxury. Besides, I own to you, my dear Mrs. Trevor, I do think that the mere insolence of titles, must fairly and thoroughly be put down, if we sincerely wish to render society agreeable; and where can we find a better example for punishment than the Duchess of Winstoun?"

“ But, my dear Lady Erpingham, *you* are thought insolent: your friend, Lady C——, is called insolent, too:—are you sure the charge is not merited?”

“ I allow the justice of the charge; but you will observe, ours is not the insolence of rank: we have made it a point to protect, to the utmost, the poor and unfriended of all circles. Are *we* ever rude to governesses or companions, or poor writers, or musicians? When a man marries below him, do we turn our backs on the poor wife? Do we not, on the contrary, lavish our attention on her, and throw round her equivocal and joyless state the protection of Fashion? No, no! *our* insolence is JUSTICE! it is the chalice returned to the lips which prepared it; it is insolence to the insolent; reflect, and you will allow it.”

“ I do: you are a sort of Ladye Chivalry.”

Were there such a man living as the phi-

losopher of observation—an Helvetius—a La Bruyere—a Voltaire—I would persecute him until he had written a book on the Philosophy of Fashion. The stupid novels we have had on the subject of Fashion, have made us sick and weary, without teaching us any thing. Fashion is, in fact, though a light name, a great subject. It is the public opinion of the lords of the social system. If it be the fashion to affect the noble, as it was once in Rome, there is something high and vigorous in the core of the community: is it the fashion to be mean, cold, superficial? shame to the nation which allows such dictators of opinion;—there is a moral disease at its heart! The fashion that Constance set and fostered was of a generous order; but it was not suited to the majority: it was corrupted by her followers into a thousand basenesses. In vain do we make a law, if the general spirit is averse to the

law. Constance could humble the great, could loosen the links of extrinsic rank; could undermine the power of titles; but that was all! She could abase the proud, but not elevate the general tone: for one slavery she only substituted another,—people hugged the chains of Fashion, as before they hugged those of Titular Arrogance.

Yet Constance, if sometimes disappointed, was satisfied on the whole. She saw that she had sown a seed which must spring up, and, overshadowing, destroy many fallacious opinions. By the growth of one tree, she had excluded the life from many weeds; and the time must come when the tree itself would be cut down, the wholesome air circulated, and more solid fruits planted in its stead. She waited that hour in patience.

Amidst the gossip of the day, she heard much of Godolphin, and all spoke of him

with interest—even those who could not comprehend his very intricate and peculiar character. Separated from her by lands and seas, there seemed no danger in allowing herself the sweet pleasure of hearing his actions and his mind discussed. She fancied she did not permit herself to *love* him; she was too pure not to start at such an idea: but her mind was not so regulated, so trained and educated in sacred principle, that she forbade herself the luxury to *remember*. Of his present mode of life she heard little. He was traced from city to city; from shore to shore; from the haughty noblesse of Vienna, to the gloomy shrines of Memphis, by occasional report, and seemed to tarry long in no place. This roving and unsettled life,—which secretly assured her of her power,—suffused his image in all tender and remorseful dyes. Ah! where is that one person to be envied, could we read the heart?

The actress had heard incidentally from Saville of Godolphin's attachment to the beautiful Countess. She longed to see her; and when, one night at the theatre, she was informed that Lady Erpingham was in the Lord Chamberlain's box, close before her, she could scarcely command her self-possession sufficiently to perform with her wonted brilliancy of effect.

She was greatly struck by the singular nobleness of Lady Erpingham's face and person; and Godolphin rose in her estimation, from the justice of the homage he had rendered to so fair a shrine. What a curious trait, by the by, that is in women;—their exaggerated anxiety to see one who has been loved by the man in whom they themselves take interest; and the manner in which the said man rises or falls in their estimation, according as they admire, or are disappointed in, the object of his love. Nothing has cured more effectually

the romantic interest the female world conceived for Byron, than a sight of the persons on whose affection he prided himself. Byron might have committed in their eyes a thousand sins more excusably than the error of bad taste.

“And so,” said Saville, supping one night with the actress, “you think the world does not overlaud Lady Erpingham?”

“No: she is what Medea would have been, if innocent—full of majesty, and yet of sweetness. It is the face of a queen of some three thousand years back. I could have worshipped her.”

“My little Fanny, you are a strange creature. Methinks you have a dash of poetry in you.”

“Nobody who has not written poetry, could ever read my character,” answered Fanny, with *naïveté*, yet with truth.

“ Yet you have not much of the ideal about you, pretty one.”

“ No ; because I was so early thrown on myself, that I was forced to make independence my chief good. I soon saw that if I followed my heart to and fro, wherever it led me, I should be the creature of every breath—the victim of every accident : I should have been the very fool of romance ; lived on a smile ; and died perhaps in a ditch at last. Accordingly, I set to work with my feelings, and pared and cut them down to a convenient compass. Happy for me that I did so ! What would have become of me if, years ago, when I loved Godolphin, I had thrown the whole world of my heart upon him ?”

“ Why, he has generosity : he would not have deserted you.”

“ But I should have wearied him,” answered Fanny ; “ and that would have been quite

enough for me. But I did love him well, and purely—(ah! you may smile!) and disinterestedly. I was only fortified in my resolution not to love any one too much, by perceiving that he had *affection* but no *sympathy* for me. His nature was different from mine. I am *woman* in every thing; and Godolphin is always sighing for a *goddess!*”

“ I should like to sketch your character, Fanny. It is original, though not strongly marked. I never met with it in any book; yet it is true to your sex, and to the world.”

“ Few people could paint me exactly,” answered Fanny. “ The danger is, that they would make too much or too little of me. But such as I am, the world ought to know what is so common, and, as you think, so undescribed.”

Poor Fanny! you will live to read these pages. Will they satisfy you? I am sure the sketch is faithful to the original. You

are one of those whom the world never accredits for much good, but you have a great deal of good in you. If the prudes say I ought not to have painted you, I tell the prudes they lie; and it is exactly because writers have been too cowardly in speaking the truth when they knew they had nothing unclean in their hearts; when they knew they were not intending to allure, but to instruct: it is exactly because writers have been thus cowardly —have thus paltered with their high calling —that poor womankind have been so thrust from the true warnings of morality; that there are so many kind hearts in wretched bosoms; so many good dispositions in evil circumstance. Shakspeare, Fielding, Goëthe, Le Sage! you instruct, you teach, because you had the courage to teach the truth!

Before I conclude this volume, I shall make one remark.

There are a herd of foolish readers, who cry

out against a book, by saying, "I hate the hero!" or, "I cannot endure the heroine!" Did the author (an author is an artist) mean that you should like his hero? or, did he mean that his hero should be natural? Are the hero and heroine flesh and blood? Do they waver? do they contend with opposing passions? Are they now good, now bad? Do they now dazzle, now revolt? If so, they are real; but they often do not arrest superficial admiration, from that very inconsistency:—decided, one-idea'd heroes strike the vulgar springs of interest with the greater force;—the million nice shades, the intricacies, the subtleties, that form such human characters as are alone worthy analysis, are lost to that reader, who *papercuts* his way to the end, asking only a coarse excitement from common-place materials. But I write not for such! I may fail in my objects—I most probably shall—but one person in ten thousand not will know

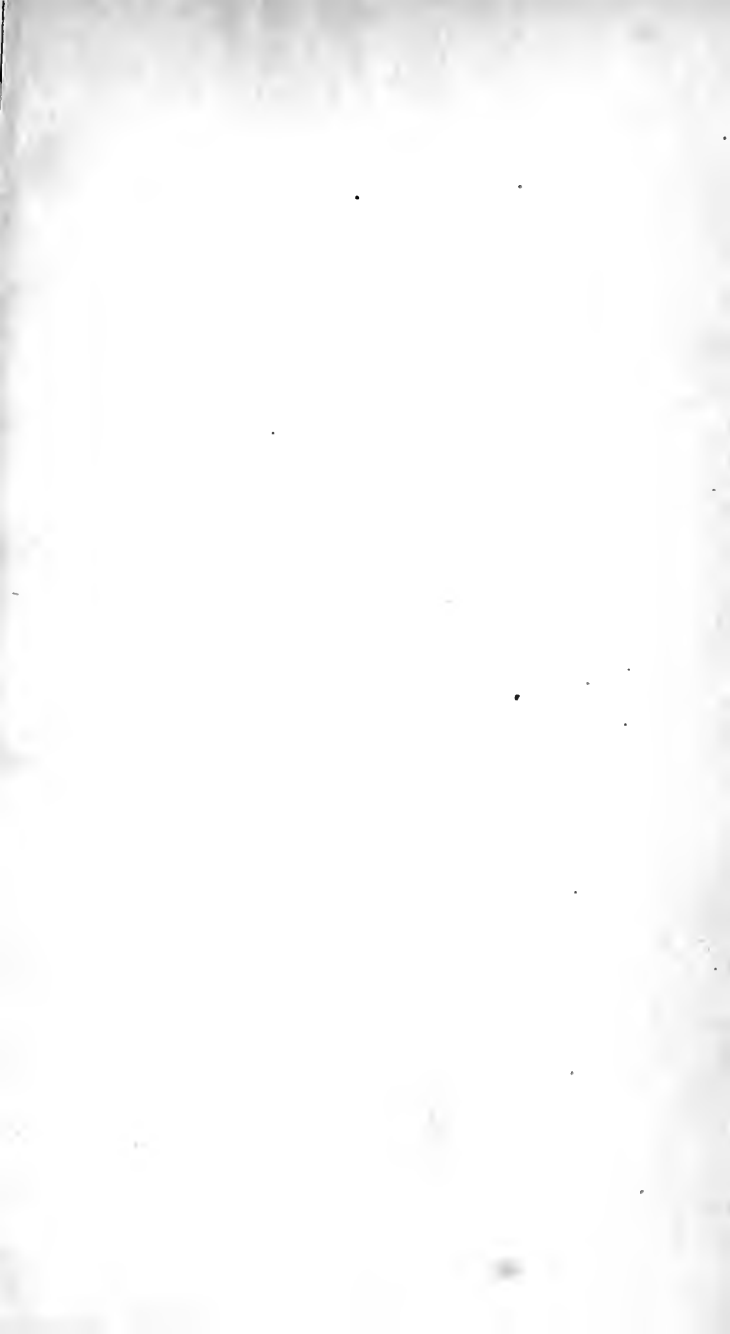
whether I have failed or no—for who will take the trouble to discover what the objects are ?

And now, beautiful Constance, farewell, for the present ! I leave you surrounded by power, and pomp, and adulation. Enjoy, as you may, that for which you sacrificed affection !

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

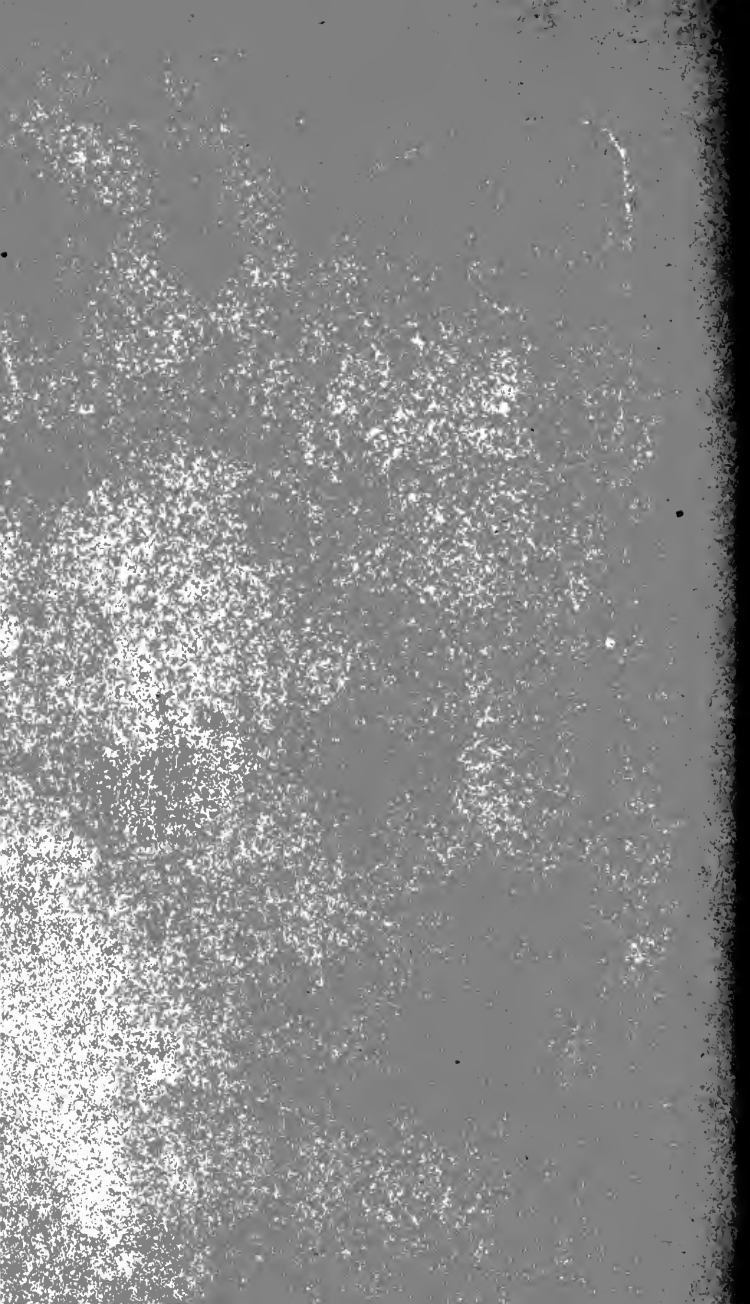
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